

‘What ever happened to breakdancing?’

**Transnational b-boy/b-girl networks, underground video magazines and
imagined *affinities*.**

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For my sister, Pauline

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Abstract

In 1997, Paul Gilroy was able to write: “I have been asking myself, whatever happened to breakdancing” (21), a form of vernacular dance associated with urban youth that emerged in the 1970s. However, in the last decade, breakdancing has experienced a massive renaissance in movies (*You Got Served*), commercials (“Gotta Have My Pops!”) and documentaries (the acclaimed *Freshest Kids*). In this thesis, I explore the historical development of global b-boy/b-girl culture through a qualitative study involving dancers and their modes of communication.

Widespread circulation of breakdancing images peaked in the mid-1980s, and subsequently b-boy/b-girl culture largely disappeared from the mediated landscape. The dance did not reemerge into the mainstream of North American popular culture until the late 1990s. I argue that the development of major transnational networks between b-boys and b-girls during the 1990s was a key factor in the return of ‘b-boying/b-girling’ (known formerly as breakdancing). Street dancers toured, traveled and competed internationally throughout this decade. They also began to create ‘underground’ video documentaries and travel video ‘magazines.’ These video artefacts circulated extensively around the globe through alternative distribution channels (including the backpacks of traveling dancers).

I argue that underground video artefacts helped to produce ‘imagined *affinities*’ between dancers in various nations. Imagined affinities are identifications expressed by a cultural producer who shares an embodied activity with other practitioners through either mediated texts or travels through new places. These ‘imagined affinities’ helped to sustain b-boy/b-girl culture by generating visual/audio representations of popularity for the dance movement across geographical regions.

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Chapter 1

(Un)popularity of street dances in popular culture

Introduction

How do we determine the popularity of an art form in popular culture? Our understanding of popularity in our everyday lives often involves the visual or audio presence of a form (whether this is dance, music or film) in particular media. Popularity is often determined by (or at least *quantifiable* by) profit margins. Visibility is often interpreted as a sign of dollars earned. What measures are used to determine critical mass in the assessment of popular culture and is popular culture determined by critical mass?

Breakdancing is a form in popular culture with an ambiguous relationship to products. As a promotional agent, the embodied dance movements are used to sell movies, music records, clothing, accessories, food products and more. Initially, the commodification of breaking's diverse promotional qualities occurred in the early to mid-1980s. After this period, the dance disappeared for a time in most North American mainstream mediated representations.

Treated as a fleeting trend in popular culture, this dance form had reached its saturation point in public tastes. However, for some of the dancers that participated in the initial surge of popularity, even developing short-lived professional careers, their involvement with the dance was not a trivial fad in their popular taste palette. They had developed a lifestyle of dance similar to the training schedule of professional dancers. Their objectives ranged from mastering dance styles, innovating new moves, historicizing street dance cultures, trying to change public

perceptions of the dance and using dance as a social instrument for community projects with youth.

As a cultural expression, breaking has an odd relationship to academic analysis, dance institutions, and big business. Although the dance is drawn on to sell products, the form is also considered to be lacking a commodity exchange-value. Popular dance studies is one of the marginalized areas of academic work, yet breaking is often acknowledged as meaningful for the studies of youth, leisure, music, sexuality, ethnicity, and globalization. Although many writers and spectators see the dance as a lowbrow street dance, to some people this dance raises important questions, both on an aesthetic level and also in terms of its socio-economic political agendas.

In 1998, Lola Ogunnaike wrote an article for the *New York Times* with the heading: “Breakdancing Regains Its Footing.” She suggests that breakdancing was once at the “forefront of the cultural flowering called hip-hop” but soon after “was left in the dust” as rap music became the major purveyor of hip hop in popular culture (Ogunnaike 1998: 1). However, she argues that breakdancing is making a comeback fueled by nostalgia in the inner-city both for retro-80s styles and “hip-hop’s more innocent days” (1). With breakdancers now popping up in music videos, she argues that the current proliferation in representations is as a sign of shifts in the popular trends of public tastes. Breakdancing, in Ogunnaike’s view, is a revived form that has just recently received life through a resurrection in popular culture. Media accounts, such as Ogunnaike’s article, often equate the disappearance of the dance form in mainstream popular culture with the disappearance of the form all together.

Just one year prior to Ogunnaike’s claim that breakdancing is back after a hiatus of over ten years, cultural theorist Paul Gilroy suggested that breakdancing had faded right out of hip

hop culture (1997). For him, breakdancing disappeared partly because its features were not easy to market and package for the consumption of hip hop as an “official popular culture” (24). Moreover, Gilroy claims that academic writers have to be quick to theorize vernacular dance traditions before they disappear. Gilroy suggests that breakdancing’s lack of commodity function is the cause for the disappearance of the form. Between these two accounts lies the question: did the dance form disappear and then reappear, or just disappear and reappear from representations in popular culture? How do we account for this gap in knowledge about the dance form? Breaking was the spectacular subculture that first drew the public’s attention towards rap music. How did the dance form that was once the most marketable aspect of hip hop culture underwent a transition into an unprofitable and marginalized element?

Two recent accounts of b-boying/b-girling¹ or breaking have suggested that the dance tradition did not disappear permanently as Gilroy had originally speculated. Raquel Rivera (2003) suggests that “after the breaking and graffiti craze of the first half of the 1980s, these art forms – as profitable commercial products – have been relegated to history, even though they still are actively cultivated in many circles” (77). She further suggests that b-boying/b-girling is “still passed on from generation to generation in New York...” (77). Jeff Chang (2005) proposes that the dance died in New York City, disappeared in the next era (replaced by other dance steps and fads) and is now practiced again by third-generation dancers in cities all around the world. For Chang, the latest generations of dancers are the global ‘disciples’ of New York City’s Rock Steady crew² (228).

Rivera highlights the preservation of the dance form in local New York City dance communities and Chang highlights the re-emergence of the dance form in a global diffusion of the dance movement. Both observations are accurate, but there is more depth to the history of

breaking over a trajectory of twenty-five years. Other accounts of rap music and hip hop culture have noted the diffusion of breaking to other countries (Banes 1984, Rose 1994, Mitchell 1996, Forman 2002). Alongside this observation, there are valuable case studies about the diffusion of breaking to various places with an acknowledgement that local appropriations do exist (Kopytko 1986, Deyhle 1998, Condry 2001, Pennay 2001, Levy 2001, Osumare 2002, Shapira 2004, Hoyler and Mayer 2006).

In sum, what we have are various analyses about the relationship of the dance form to issues of globalization, and suggestions about the longevity of the dance form, with no detailed analysis of its period of unpopularity. The dance was once a major player in a burgeoning hip hop culture, and then the form disappeared from representations in popular culture but remained a central part of hip hop lifestyles in many circles. The dance is currently practiced by new generations of dancers both as a part of local traditions and as a part of the global diffusion of hip hop elements. Now the dance form is popular again in North America. By combining all of the above accounts, we are left with an incomplete story about the history of b-boying/b-girling as a cultural movement.

Breaking has experienced a massive renaissance in with popular culture in the last decade. However, during the 'dark ages,' the dance was sustained and cultivated regardless of (or in spite of) its relationship to popular cultural tastes. Why has a dance form that Gilroy suggests was not easily marketable or commodified for popular tastes (thus disappearing) now re-emerging on a global scale as a widely accepted popular culture activity?

Somehow b-boying/b-girling continued to be practiced outside the gaze of mainstream popular culture long enough to resurface in representations over a decade later. Where do we find the traces of the unpopular phases of a dance form that was first celebrated and then rejected

by popular culture? Can a dance form be ‘unpopular’ popular culture: practiced but not acknowledged? If so, what is the significance for the dancers of continuing to learn and hone dance styles that have passed into a period of unpopularity?

The major task of this project is to explore how dancers communicated transnationally during the 1990s before further networks developed through the World Wide Web. More specifically, I ask how dancers communicated with few mass representations in North American popular culture. I suggest how dancers networked on a transnational scale after the global diffusion of hip hop culture in the early to mid-1980s and before the proclaimed return of the form within North American popular culture in the late 1990s.

Definition of terms

B-Boys and b-girls are defined as people (whether youth or adults) that perform the street dance form often known as breaking. The term is not used to describe people that participate in other aspects of hip hop culture including emcees, graffiti artists and DJs. Obviously these categories have elements of ambiguity. Some dancers take part in the other elements of the culture as well. B-boying/b-girling then is the act of performing a street dance, not necessarily on the street, but the actual style of dance known in the media as ‘breakdancing.’ By definition this excludes other hip hop dances such as popping and locking. Again, there is ambiguity here as other dance styles often share space, a common history and an overlapping community with b-boying and b-girling. Also, some dancers are well-versed in various dance styles or create hybrid dance styles. When I refer to street dance, I am not referring to the location where people

dance or implying the ethnic make-up of the dancers. Rather, street dance is an overarching term that encompasses b-boying/b-girling, popping and locking and other hip hop dance styles.

Battles are defined as the competition between two or more dancers. In battles each b-boy/b-girl takes a turn trying to one-up their opponent. There are two major categories of battles. Some battles are formal and dancers have agreed to compete against each other. Generally these battles are judged by legendary b-boys/b-girls, local or 'old school' dancers, and members of the community or a crowd of spectators. Other battles are informal. For example, a dancer might pick a battle with another dancer during a cypher. Cyphers are similar to battles except that in cyphers dancers are not explicitly competing with each other but instead taking informal turns in a circle. An analogy for this distinction would be the difference between a soccer match (the battle) and a soccer scrimmage (the cypher). The only major distinction from this analogy is that the cypher can turn into a battle at any time. The circle is the space that dancers create with their bodies as they surround the performing dancer.

I am describing the word transnational in an everyday use of the word. Transnationalism is used to describe connections beyond nations. I do not give the term any positive or negative connotations in a political sense. Adding to this, I borrow the concept of 'dance networks' from Laing (1997) who uses this term to describe musical phenomena flowing across national and continental borders. My analyses will describe dance networks as networks of dancers and their flow of communications, rather than networks of DJs. A network contains a variety of overlapping lines of communication across various geographical regions. Transnational dance networks, as defined here, include the links, contacts and relationships between dancers who live in different countries.

When I refer to videos, I am not discussing commercially produced music videos for television programs such as Much Music or MTV. The underground videos that I am analyzing in this project were first circulated through videotapes in the hands of dancers and then later were sold in hip hop stores and over the World Wide Web. Many of the early videos have now been transferred to the digital video format and are available on DVD. However, they are referred to as videos here. I have several preliminary categories for the videos including: underground b-boy/b-girl video magazines, video travel logs and underground video documentaries. These terms all refer to the same types of videos with minor distinctions. Video travel logs are videos created by traveling dancers that feature b-boys/b-girls from various parts of the world.

Underground videos refer to videos created by b-boys/b-girls whether this is a crew, collective or solo dancer. Underground b-boy/b-girl video magazines refer to videos created by one or more dancers that feature dancers from various parts of the world and take on the aesthetics of a magazine. The major difference between the travel logs and the video magazines is that the travel logs document a journey of dancers on tour and the video magazines are compiled to showcase dancers from around the world without the context of a particular tour or journey.

1990s transnational dance networks and underground video communications

The dance form resurfaced in popular culture during the late 1990s. At this time, representations and coverage suggested that the dance was now practiced globally. Also, elements of dancers' self-representation in the media had changed. The first purpose of this study is to examine the transnational networks that dancers developed in the 1990s. There is

evidence of significant communications between dancers in various countries during this time period.

Secondly, this project explores the dancers' use of video technologies to communicate with each other across nations in this little understood time period. Underground b-boy/b-girl videos began to play a prevalent role in aiding dialogues between dancers. The dancers' alternative video productions, distributions, and receptions created historical archives of the dance form. I discuss what kind of information dancers were sharing, their reasons for seeking out affinities with dancers from other places and the results of their efforts. The underground b-boy/b-girl videos circulated through developing networks of dancers and this distribution extended the visual communications of the dance.

My initial research questions covered a wide spectrum of concerns including: How did dancers circulate information about the dance during the unpopular period of the dance? What role did media play? Are there visual records of this time period? How were these videos copied and circulated? How can we find out about this history? Why did dancers make videos?

This study is important to future projects on b-boying/b-girling because I draw attention to a historical time period of the dance movement that has been neglected. This will provide future studies with a context to situate newer developments in the dance form (aesthetics, styles, communications, etc.). This study also raises methodological questions such as: How do researchers determine the popularity of b-boy/b-girl culture? Why did this period of the dance get ignored in even contemporary research about the dance?

Unless the history of this dance art form is addressed, results of case studies may appear ahistorical. The dance is valuable to analyze in terms of ethnicities, sexuality, gender and globalization and a fuller historical context can provide some leverage to these themes. Also,

studies of various other popular dance practices can benefit from a comparison to the trajectory of b-boy/b-girl history. For example, new dance styles like krumping and clowning are celebrated in newspaper accounts. This coverage of new dance styles is very similar to representations of breakdancing in newspaper coverage during the early 1980s.

B-boying/b-girling was a passing trend by 1986 in North America³. However, the dance form demonstrated a cultural resilience against the rejection by popular culture. People around the world sought out and maintained a dance art form that was built up and then rejected by popular taste. We need studies to find out how this dance form was continued. Hip hop culture is a global force and dominant aspect of popular culture. However, the element of street dance was only studied during the initial popular craze for the dance in the early 1980s and considered again after the late 1990s resurgence of the dance style in popular culture.

From historical accounts to imagined *affinities*

B-boying/b-girling has experienced renewed popularity. The proliferation of representations of dance on television, as well as the resurgence of coverage in academic literature, refers to the renewed interest in b-boy/b-girl culture. The dance appears in many televised representations from commercials, to talk shows, to music videos and dance competitions. Also newspaper articles about the dance have increased again although not to the astronomical levels that occurred in the early 1980s. (As mentioned earlier, newer dance crazes such as krumping and clowning have experienced a surge of coverage in newspaper articles in the last few years⁴). All of these archival sources require considerations such as: Can a cultural form be perceived as popular even though it is not represented on television or in newspaper?

How many representations do we need to determine the popularity of a form? How do we determine its unpopularity? How do dancers understand unpopularity in relation to various mediated representations?

I've determined the unpopular stage of the dance by doing preliminary studies on two archives in New York City and Toronto to assess the amount of coverage devoted to the dance. For example, I analyzed how many articles were produced about the dance in mainstream newspapers from the early 1980s until the present. In these newspapers, there were shifts in the tone that writers used when discussing this dance form. For example, the early 1980s articles are more celebratory and the 1985 articles associated the dance with gangs and injuries. The dance articles dissipate by the end of 1985. In New York City, local newspapers began to mention the tours of the Ghetto Original Dance Company in the early 1990s. However, by the late 1990s, there was a significant increase in articles that indicated that the dance was 'back.'

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature on b-boy and b-girl culture. I suggest that local case studies on breaking practices have yet to consider *how* meaning is generated transnationally. B-boying/b-girling material doesn't adequately cover the North American dancers' travels and tours during the early to mid-1990s or how these travels contributed to the production, distribution and circulation of underground videos. Also, there is a general absence of study on the unpopular period of the dance during the 1990s.

In Chapter 3, I will discuss my methodology. I use a mixed-method qualitative approach including interviews, participant observation, archival research and video analysis. This combination of methods produces a dialectic between interpretation and experience, as described by Clifford (1988). I use the idea of a negotiation between methods and analysis to dance the fine line connecting my former role as a b-girl and my new role as a mixed method researcher.

The various archival and interview sources provide a means of triangulation in methods that will be examined in the methods chapter.

I interviewed dancers from New York City, Los Angeles and Toronto. The sample size is not large, which is a limitation of the study, but I also targeted dancers with many years of experience and who participated in the production of videos that circulated during this decade. Also, during the interviews dancers recalled their first encounters with images of dancers from other places through videos.

I studied obscure artefacts such as the circulating videos that dancers began to produce. These video artefacts provided a basis for an analysis of the cultural communication channels. The videos captured many of the early battles that are historicized in the oral accounts of dancers. My methods chapter presents some of the methodological concerns I considered when evaluating the usefulness of visual historical documents.

In Chapter 4, I begin my analysis of how dancers communicated in the 1990s. I argue that dancers were sharing information with each other through various sources. This included the efforts of touring, traveling dancers who created home made videos to share dance knowledge with other b-boys and b-girls. These factors will require further analysis in future studies to understand the impact of the dance form on hip hop culture and popular culture, and the resurgence of the form in popular taste globally. I ask: What role did videos play in the building of transnational networks? How did the dance culture sustain itself in the 1990s and then develop new ways to communicate cross culturally?

Chapter 5 introduces a concept that I term '*imagined affinities*' to describe the identifications that dancers were cultivating transnationally through their shared dance practices. I describe the identifications built between dancers through the production, distribution and

reception of underground video artefacts. After the initial networks developed preliminary affinities between dancers, the videos enabled an extension of these networks through the cultivation of further imagined affinities. In this chapter, I also borrow from Boutros and Straw's (forthcoming) work dealing with theories of circulation, as well as borrowing key concepts from Straw's (2005) article: "Pathways of Cultural Movement."

Chapter 6 concludes my study with some final remarks about b-boy/b-girl communications. I suggest some preliminary new directions and ideas for future works in the study of popular and sometimes unpopular dance forms. Also, this chapter will question some of the arguments about hip hop culture in terms of locality as this relates to the specificities of dance culture.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined some of the goals and objectives of this project. This includes the recovery of historical accounts about b-boying/b-girling during the 1990s. I outlined this project's emphasis on the transnational dance networks that were formed throughout this time period. Also, I've indicated that this project will focus on the role of underground videos in b-boy/b-girl culture in strengthening transnational networks. The next chapter will address the gaps in the academic literature on b-boy and b-girl history so far.

Chapter 2

Literature review: Popular dance studies and b-boy/b-girl culture

Introduction

This chapter addresses how the academic literature about breaking is marginalized in the emerging field of popular dance studies. There are three dominant themes in the literature on b-boying/b-girling that I will address in this chapter. These three themes reflect major explorations of this project: the study of transnational b-boy/b-girl networks in the 1990s, the impact of traveling dancers and the analysis of the culture through the archives of underground b-boy/b-girl videos.

The first theme explores how past studies of street dance are marginalized in the new field of popular dance studies. The second theme questions how the studies about b-boying/b-girling have analyzed the marginal, mediated practices of the global dance form. The third theme addresses the absence of theoretical considerations about underground b-boy/b-girl videos.

Section 1: In the eye of the beholder

There have been numerous observations about the lack of attention towards popular dance in academic writing (Goodwin 1992, Thomas 1993, McRobbie 1994, Thomas 1995). These critiques do not consider articles on breaking¹ or hip hop culture². Questions of gender and youth subcultures directed much of the earlier analysis of popular dance. As McRobbie

(1984) suggests, popular dance is the area that is the least examined in popular culture. Also dance studies and performance studies in general have only recently developed as fields of study with theoretical focuses (Goellner and Shea Murphy 1995). First I ask: how did breaking disappear from considerations in academic literature dealing with popular culture? Secondly, how did studies referring to breaking disappear from deliberation in the emerging field of popular dance studies?

There are several reasons why b-boying/b-girling and other street dance forms such as popping and locking are marginalized in popular dance studies. Even though breakdancing was seen as a popular dance form in the early 1980s and was practiced in many countries during this time period, the dance was referred to as a spectacular subculture. For example, McRobbie (1984) suggests in her article about popular dance that she will not consider spectacular subcultures such as breakdancing. When writers began to theorize the dance practices of ‘everyday’ people, this dance style was not considered. I suspect this is due to its complicated and contradictory position as a marginal, male-dominated, predominantly non-white spectacular subculture.

In one of the first attempts to consider popular dance, McRobbie (1984) suggests a relationship between dance and mainstream movies like *Flashdance* and *Fame*³. Her focus is on the everyday lives of white lower to middle class girls in the UK. She suggests that her work is concerned with addressing the value of everyday dance in the arena of cultural studies analysis. For example, McRobbie analyses *Flashdance* from a position of identification with the female lead character. She reveals that this is testament to her own personal experiences in the world. In the eyes of the majority of spectators and mediators of breakdancing in the early 1980s, the

dance style was perceived as a spectacular subculture or spectacle. The media treated the dance this way, and dancers were put on display and treated in an often derogatory light.

The media assumptions parallel the assumptions of cultural theorists of this time. McRobbie is responding to an emphasis in cultural studies on spectacular subcultures by avoiding considerations of popular dance styles such as break dancing. Therefore, McRobbie does not consider how *Flashdance* has inspired new generations of b-boy/b-girl practitioners from all around the world. In one very short scene in the movie, the main character watches b-boys dancing on the street. This very short sequence in the film is often heralded for propelling breaking worldwide (Banes 1985, *Freshest Kids* 2002). Although McRobbie sets up the relationship between popular dance styles and mass mediated representations of dance in movies⁴, she does not consider the impact that movies can have on b-boy/b-girl culture. This is another area of investigation altogether. McRobbie chose not to address the spectacular subculture known as breakdancing instead setting up popular dance considerations including: categories of divergent dance practices, concerns for gendered expressions through dance and the opposing use of space in various dance scenes.

From very early on in the writing about popular dance, writers have made reference to different types of scenes. McRobbie restricts her investigation of popular dance to two “fairly typical” examples of dance practice (1984: 146). The first scene is the ‘respectable’ city discos frequented by youth under twenty-five. The second scene is the punk, new wave or alternative discos frequented by subcultural youth. She argues that each of these scenes is a different social space, where very different behaviors are expected and ritualistically enacted. The first category of scenes she discusses is a predictably gendered space where practices represent particularly conventional social values and rules. Whereas this first scene has a specific age demographic,

McRobbie argues that the second type of scene, the alternative scene, is a place where lines of gender, age and sexual orientation are blurred through social enactments. Here the two categories of scene offer up different use of spaces. These are two types of scenes where various musical tastes and diverging lifestyle practices have opposing social and moral codes. The second scene, she argues, allows for more transgressions of traditional femininity.

Various writings about popular dance have offered competing interpretations about the major areas to address in the study of popular dance. Three categories for analyzing dance as a social experience that McRobbie suggests are: “dance as image...dance as fantasy and...dance as social activity” (130). Many of the other early writing dealing with popular dance were driven initially by a concern to find the connection between music and dance. For example, Chambers (1985) connects dancing to popular music. He describes how dance is the body “enveloped in sound” (17) and he argues that dance demonstrates the intersection of popular music and leisure time. Like Chambers, Goodwin (1992) wants to consider the relationship between popular music and dance specifically. He suggests that dance should be studied as the embodiment of music.

There are similarities in some of the concerns that early popular dance writers have suggested. For example, many writers refer to the relationship between dance and social environments. For McRobbie, dance is one of the most practiced forms of leisure, especially with single youth, and dance often appears in a variety of visual texts including film. For Chambers, dancing is also where socialized pleasures and individual desires meet through a moment where the body is rediscovered. These assumptions about who practices popular dance represent historical assumptions about ‘culture’ and ‘everyday’ practices.

Later on, many writers in the developing field of popular dance studies focused on developments in rave and club cultures (Redhead 1993, Thornton 1996, Bennett 2000, Ueno 2003, Thomas 2003). These studies embrace the spectacular subcultures of raves and rave dancing in the UK context. By the time Thomas (2003) begins to review the literature about popular dance in the UK, breaking had disappeared entirely from consideration (announced as dead in the theorizations of Gilroy in one of Thomas' (1997) edited volumes). However, Thomas' massive overview of the literature in studies of the body, dance and culture neglects earlier studies dealing with b-boying/b-girling including Sally Banes' detailed accounts of breaking (1985). Thomas includes Banes' work addressing modern and post-modern dances but does not consider Banes' contributions and analysis of street dance forms⁵.

Breaking! And the media!

During the early era of breaking, Holman (1984) recalls that the dance styles, fashions and music had yet to be picked up by the mass media. According to his experiences in the scene in 1974, the dance styles of breaking were still the hip styles of local popular tastes in New York City neighborhoods. Holman also suggests that long before any journalistic accounts of the dance, the popular tastes had already shifted. Likewise as indicated by other dancers and writers, by 1977 to 1978, breakdancing was already considered uncool by most of the original Black dancers and the Puerto Rican dancers took over (Dyson 2004). For writers Fricke and Ahearn (2002), Puerto Rican youth started dominating the dance by 1976. All of the early accounts focus on issues of ethnicity and cultural lineages. Most of these accounts attempt to historicize the early epoch of the dance through specific dates and shifts of the ethnic and class origins of

the dancers. These categories are constructed divisions. I am suggesting that the dance form was not practiced by *every* male youth in the Bronx – but rather reflects a select group.

Although the early writers attached socioeconomic meanings to the dance based on issues of identity, class and ethnicity, we also need to recognize that there was a minority of youth artists that were practitioners of this embodied dance, a form of dance that requires major effort to master. This consideration is based around my conversations with dancers from New York City who test each other by asking ‘what battle were you at?’ to confirm the authenticity of other b-boys from the Bronx that claim they used to dance ‘back in the day’⁶. In other words, their authenticity⁷ was based on their embodied practice of dance in b-boy battles. My project investigates how dancers identify with each other because of their activities and shared values as dancers.

The first accounts about breaking often focused on questions about the socioeconomic origins of the dancers and the role of the media in the dance form’s development. According to Sally Banes (1985), as soon as the media became involved in covering the street dance styles emerging in New York City, the definitions of the dance (and value judgments surrounding the dance) went through a series of changes. She would know this first hand. When Banes first heard about the dance she had trouble tracking down any practitioners at all. When she finally found dancers she wrote the first journalistic article about breaking in April 1981 for the *Village Voice* with photographs by Martha Cooper (Hager 1984, Banes 1986). After this, the media took an extended interest in the dance, as did the New York art and dance communities.

In the early 1980s, movies such as *Flashdance* (Lynne, 1983), *Beat Street* (Latham, 1984), *Wild Style* (Ahearn, 1982), *Style Wars*, (Chalfont and Silver, 1983) brought media representations of the dance around the world. Popular dance styles lead to the diffusion of

popular music styles. For example, Banes identifies breaking as the element of hip hop culture that brought media frenzy to hip hop music (Banes 1985).

The involvement of the media and dance institutions began to create infrastructures that displayed various street dance forms to the (coded white) public. Many of the early dance writers were actively involved with the b-boy scene. For example, Banes helped to organize breaking events, made new t-shirts for dancers, and wrote articles about the dance for academic journals, dance magazines and the general public. Both Banes and Cooper (a photographer) helped the Rock Steady Crew to stage a battle, customizing shirts for them with iron-on letters (Chang 2005). Also, some writers, fans and cultural tastemakers also managed street dance crews at this time at varying capacities (*Freshest Kids* 2002).

The early writings about breaking situated the dance style within a longer lineage of Afro-Diaspora dances. Both Banes (1984) and Holman (1984) link the dance to African American dance traditions. Although both writers situate the dance within traditions of black culture and dance styles, they acknowledge that the b-boys themselves did not stress this emphasis. This was probably due to the reality that many of the most well-known dancers in New York b-boy/b-girl culture were Puerto Rican (Flores 1994)! According to Holman (1984), most of the black youth had stopped participating in this dance lifestyle. At this time, a group of predominantly Puerto Rican youth began to pick up the dance styles and evolve them in new directions.

For the dancers, what they were creating was an original new style that evolved out of gang initiations⁸. According to local television shows of this time period and accounts by early writers such as Banes, the dance styles were inspired by the movements of cartoon figures, kids in the neighborhood and current dance trends on television shows. For Banes, the dance styles

also demonstrated a form of postmodern parody where b-boys imitated visual movements readily accessible through mainstream popular culture including cartoons and pin-ups. Holman situates b-boying/b-girling in a mixture of black dance styles, inspiration from international films and hybrid identities.

The media interest changed a gang street dance style into a symbolic form. Banes argues that breakdancing changed in “form and meaning” after the media hype of the early 1980s. Frith agrees with Banes’ earlier analysis that the dance began as a style that articulated boasting and taunting of opponents and then shifted to a style that onstage began to symbolize or represent the boast and taunt. He builds on this analysis by asking: if dance is a form of communication then what does it mean? Two other questions he poses are “how do dancers know how to listen to music?” and “does a dancer express the music, or respond to it?” (223). My project focuses on how dancers generate meanings for the dance transnationally. I am interested in the emerging symbolic meanings that dancers attached to the style through their travels and video productions.

Points of mergers: Breaking studies and popular dance studies

There are few studies that have overlapping concerns for popular dance and breaking. The only two analyses where considerations of breaking have been used to enhance interpretations about popular culture have emphasized concerns about gender. Frith (1996), like McRobbie, suggests that the meaning of dance performances is gendered in the reception of spectators. For both genders, popular dance fulfills a social function and also involves a response to music through involvement of the body. Mass culture is often associated with femininity (see Huyssen 1986 and Modleski 1986) and popular dance is treated by particular

cultural representations as a feminine activity. This suggests how popular dance studies are constantly being set apart from work on (coded masculine) musical practices.

Gender is also evaluated in newer studies with an emphasis on the experiences of b-girls in hip hop culture. In “Learning From B-Girls” Ogaz (2006) addresses the intersection of popular dance studies and studies of b-boy/b-girl culture through a feminist/womanist⁹ ethnographic study of b-girls. She speaks about the “co-optation of hip hop by the mainstream” (170) in a way that emphasizes gender representations and relationships. This latest work addressing b-girls includes major sections from interviews with two legendary ‘old-school’ b-girls. Ogaz expresses her own personal affinity for the b-girls of the culture because of their similar use of naming themselves and their non-white cultural backgrounds. This is one of the few accounts that explicitly describe b-girls as part of popular culture. Her study demonstrates how the intersection in popular culture between b-girls and feminism (womanism) provides a moment of rupture for considerations of breaking as a popular dance art form. Similarly, filmmaker and womanist, Rachel Raimist (1999), directed a film called: *Nobody Knows My Name* featuring political activist and b-girl Asia One. This film circulated through the distribution channels of a feminist filmmaking organization: *Women Make Movies*. The intersection of both Ogaz’s study and Raimist’s film work emphasize the marginal status of women within hip hop culture but don’t explore the unity that b-boys and b-girls feel for each other.

Section 2: Breaking as a marginal, mediated practice

From the first articles of Banes¹⁰ onwards, the approach to the media as a homogenizer of b-boy/b-girl culture and dance styles was fixed into historical accounts of b-boy/b-girl history. Sarah Thornton's (1996) work offers one of the first challenges to the role of media in subcultures and this is further challenged by the relationship of hip hop culture to the media. The popularity of the dance and unpopularity of the dance at various times complicate this history, as various local scenes die off and new scenes form in different areas of the globe and with newer generations.

Breaking was the most attractive aspect of hip hop culture and appealed to media interest more than rap or graffiti, both of these other elements were initially considered to be detrimental to the public (Hager 1984). With the release and huge success of the movie *Flashdance* (Lynne, 1983), breakers began to appear on talk shows, national commercials and MTV (Hager 1984). As mentioned earlier, in the movie *Flashdance* there is a very short sequence on a street where the main character watches some b-boys dance including Frosty Freeze and Crazy Legs. This short sequence caught the attention of youth worldwide. Youth subsequently began to practice street dancing by emulating the dancers seen in this short segment of the film.

Two of the dominant concerns for analysis of breaking are set up by Banes (1985). First, Banes considers dealing with the dance form in its social context including the socio-economic backgrounds and lifestyles of the original dancers. Second, she considers the role of the media in the production of meanings for the dance style and culture. Banes argues that there are two key time periods: the time *before* and the time *after* media involvement with the dance. For Banes, everything about the dance is contingent on this shift. The social function of the dance, aesthetic styles and ethnic and class origins of dancers are read through the before/after media dichotomy.

After the media became involved, the dance style (that she describes as part of the hip hop subculture) became homogenized and frozen (Banes 1985). According to Banes the dance form was legitimated by the media involvement and also was co-opted through this process. Banes' observation is similar to Dick Hebdige's (1979) seminal text *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. He argues that subcultural styles are frozen through their commodification and media attention. These accounts suggest that the dance form is heavily affected by its relationship to the media.

For Hebdige, the media provides a top-down transmission that contains culture and forces coherence amongst social actors. Hebdige suggests that youth sometimes adhere to the preferred meanings offered by channels of mass communication while at other times provide alternative readings from representations excluded from larger distribution channels. In this tension rests the possibilities for what is to come, the resilience of social participants to adhere neither to preferred readings, nor celebrate blocked readings, but rather create new distribution channels and meanings.

Similar to Banes's (1985) theoretical model, Rivera (2003) associates the mass mediation of the dance style with a watering down and stifling of the cultural form. She does not consider how the dancers she interviewed create their own mediated images of the dance (as well as produce the images of dancers from around the world through their production of videotexts). However, Rivera does offer one of the most current analyses dealing with the reception of breaking in the early 1980s through the press (see pp. 67-77 for this coverage). She suggests that the dance had faded out by the mid 1980s even though breaking is still passed along "from generation to generation in New York nightclubs, community centers and parties" like the Rocksteady Crew and Zulu Nation anniversaries. She also notes that breaking made a quote-

unquote comeback in the media during the late 1990s. Through all of this, Rivera follows an adherence to the earlier model of media presented by Banes and she rearticulates the multiethnic origins of the dance that have been lost since Banes' early work. Rivera suggests that the mass mediation of hip hop culture omits the multiethnic history and "artistic expressions that include music, dance and visual art" (14). This omission is also found in the writing about b-boy/b-girl culture that addresses the dance as a black popular cultural form. Although both Holman (1984) and Banes (1985), the early writers of the dance, acknowledged the multiethnic backgrounds of the dancers later works collapse this observation. The work of Rivera provides a crucial element in readdressing the socio-cultural development of b-boy/b-girl culture as a purveyor of hybrid, contested and negotiated identities. I am interested in exploring meanings surrounding mediated images in global b-boy/b-girl culture.

There have been hefty challenges lodged at the initial understandings of the relationship between the media and subcultures. Sarah Thornton's (1996) influential work on club cultures in the UK establishes some key challenges to models of subcultures developed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies including Hebdige's (1979) analysis of the role of the media in relation to youth subculture. Hebdige suggests that the media homogenizes subcultures. For Thornton, various types of media are present in the formation of subcultures. She argues that underground cultures define themselves in opposition to the mainstream. The media is present from the onset of subcultures that are defined as oppositional forces and there are various forms of media that are central to subcultural developments. What Thornton does successfully is mark out the crucial role that media play in the "series of institutional networks essential to the creation, classification and distribution of cultural knowledge" (118). She identifies for clubbers and ravers three main types of media including micro, niche and mass media. Thornton then

focuses on the relationship between the media and subcultures as one of insider/outsider ideology, where the media dictates through its reception of forms whether they are hip or not. This is perhaps useful in the study of club cultures, although not as pertinent to the early history of b-boying/b-girling. I will suggest that b-boys and b-girls do not determine whether their dance styles are legitimate through a response to the media, but rather use alternative media to legitimize their dances.

The articles by Sally Banes (1984, 1994) and Michael Holman (1984) imply that the markers of subcultural neighborhood tastes are not always determined by the mass media or 'mainstream' anxiety or celebration of the new subculture. Also, the insider's taste is often determined by the popular trends of the time and the ongoing shifts in the search for new activities in various cultural forms. For example, Holman and Banes both point out that many of the dancers had lost interest in this type of popular dance before the media had ever caught a glimpse of the style. The cycle then is not necessarily ideologically determined by its oppositional relationship to mass media. Thornton's main questions around media are: "how do youth's subcultural ideologies position the media?" and "how are the media instrumental in the congregation of youth and the formation of subcultures?" (121).

Popular dances, I will argue, have a very intricate relationship to mainstream media but also a strong resilience against its containment. For example, television shows viewed by youth influenced the dance trends that circulate as sites of pleasure, enjoyment and expression. Dancers also celebrate their appropriations and brainstorming of ideas from inspiration found through movies, cartoons and television programs. Rather than asking, as Thornton does, how the media contributes to the formation of subcultures, my work will ask the question that

follows: how did b-boys and b-girls demonstrate resilience to the influence of mass media and produce their own media distribution, circulation and exhibition practices?

Global appropriations of breaking

Local case studies have provided some of the most thorough accounts of b-boy/b-girl culture so far. One of the early case studies to thoroughly examine breakdancing in relationship to media and local identities was conducted by Kopytko (1986). Kopytko's anthropological considerations of breakdancing provide one of the most astute considerations of the dance to date. She considers a wide variety of factors including: the role of media, public infrastructures for dance, meaning attached to minority ethnic identities and knowledge about dance in the experiences of breakdancing youth.

Kopytko's study was conducted in 1984 in the city of Palmerston North in New Zealand. She explains that her analysis can only represent this particular locale and may be different for other parts of New Zealand. Also, the dance and activities of dancers are seen very differently by those inside and outside of the culture. For Kopytko, the media affects the general public's acceptability of the dance at any given moment. For example, the dance was first seen as a novelty when it emerged in 1983 and then was linked to crime and health hazards later. The dancers that she interviewed were discriminated against both due to an account of their social or class position and also on the basis of their minority ethnicities. The majority of dance practitioners were male Maori or Pacific Islanders.

The role of the media is often considered in the global appropriations of breaking and hip hop culture. For example, according to Kopytko many dancers had exposure to breaking through

representations of dancers on music videos and films from North America. These videos were influential to the youth who identified with the ethnic minority status of the dancers represented. Although the dancers in Kopytko's study often expressed their own localized experience through dance, they also felt connections with the larger, international breakdance community. Kopytko does not explore why the youth feel this connection or what the ramifications of this identification may become.

How do we measure the points where breaking disappears and re-emerges? By 1985, according to Kopytko, the dance had virtually died out in Palmerston North. Those dancers that wanted to continue to dance had lost their access to the structures and locations that had made the dance practices and performances accessible in the initial stages. It is possible that a small residual scene of dancers continued to keep practicing b-boying/b-girling in their homes. In another ethnographic case study on breaking, Deyhle (1998) studies the resistance practices of Navajo youth. She explains that there were breakdancing crews in the area when she began her study in 1984. However, when she returned in 1990 the youth were interested in heavy metal. Deyhle reads this shift as a result of musical genres in the formation of identity constructions. She misses contextualizing the larger shifts in b-boy/b-girl culture. The dance style perhaps faded out in places where dancers became involved through identifications with mediated images that subsided. It is possible that the youth stopped dancing when those mediated images of breaking stopped appearing.

Other areas of the world have developed stronger ties with North American dancers and have a sustained involvement in the transnational networks of b-boys and b-girls. In Condry's (2001) account of dancers in Japan, he references how both movies and live performances by dancers from the Bronx brought the dance overseas. Condry writes that breakdancing in Japan

gained popularity not only through the independent film *Wild Style* (Chalfont and Silver, 1983), but also through a live performance by the Rock steady Crew. Also, the surge of breakdancing was brought by the reception of films. However, the community was built through local practices in the park. Networks were built right away between dancers from New York City and Japan. Japanese dancers identify the influence of dancers like Mr. Wiggles, who performed live on tour in Japan.

In the larger web of hip hop culture, the popular dance styles are often noticed as the element that initially developed in various countries before rap music was appropriated. For example, in *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the U.S.A.* (Mitchell 2001) many writers address break dancing or b-boying/b-girling in articles about global appropriations of hip hop culture. There is a theme running through these articles of b-boying/b-girling practices being the instigator for the introductory element of hip hop culture to various parts of the world including Germany, Bulgaria and Japan (respectively Pennay 2001, Levy 2001, Condry 2001). Peterson and Bennett suggest that hip hop [music] often has “highly particularized local reworkings” that “engage with issues of race, identity and place in various national and regional settings” (Peterson and Bennett 2005: 8). On the other hand, according to Osumare (2002) the breakdancing scene in Hawaii demonstrates how b-boys/b-girls have a universal communication form displayed through the aesthetics of their dance exchanges in battles.

Dancers that have never met can communicate and battle with similar moves. Thus, for Osumare, dancers are conscious of the dance styles and what they communicate on a transnational scale. Osumare calls this phenomenon the intercultural body of the global breakdancing movement. Osumare does not provide a detailed account of *how* the dance styles’ meanings are communicated transnationally beyond the travel of a few dancers to Hawaii. My

study will provide a preliminary investigation into *how* dance meanings were communicated and even more importantly, how these meanings are *negotiated* transnationally. To investigate this, I need to set up some models for communications in hip hop culture and popular dance studies to see how we can *negotiate* a meaning between these texts.

One possibility could be that global b-boys and b-girls learn from mainstream media the codes and conventions of breaking. For example, in Deyhle's (1998) study, two subcultural members enjoy watching their favorite movie, *Breakin'* (Silberg, 1984). The youth find empowerment through their identification with the main characters that are "poor, young, and Black or brown" (4). The youth forms of resistance that Deyhle found weren't in opposition to mass media, or through b-boys identifying themselves in opposition to the mainstream, but rather through identifying with mediated representations of minority figures that stand up and speak out against inequalities.

I am suggesting that there is a lack in local, ethnographic studies of b-boying/b-girling to consider *how* the meaning of the dance is negotiated, shared and challenged transnationally. I have already questioned some of the early writers' considerations about the dance form as a spectacular subculture. Here I investigate questions surrounding the authenticity of dancers, as this relates to my studies' investigation of transnational meanings and exchanges.

Who does the dance 'belong' to? Who gets to judge this?

Many of the early accounts suggested that breakdancing is a complicated expression of ghetto life (Brake 1985). Like the dance, Brake sees the black music of this time as a celebration of the "authenticity of black life" (123). Brake's focus on black music and bodies means that his

account does not consider the role of Puerto Rican youth or the marginal and very few white youth that also were dancing in the Bronx (*Freshest Kids* 2002). Also, Brake describes the performance of “ghetto music” as a sensual and danceable experience. This assumption is problematic. Many popular music writers have critiqued the correlation that writers such as Brake have made between black bodies and sensuality, sexuality and rhythm (Frith 1981, Goodwin 1992). These critiques point out that this is a perspective that others people and authenticity is, after all, a value judgment. Rose (1994) suggests that the postindustrial landscape and emerging technologies provide the tension and contradictory elements necessary to sustain hip hop culture beyond what she considers to be a simplified interpretation that relies solely on oral modes of communications in black cultural traditions. My project begins a preliminary investigation to find out how the oral traditions of b-boy/b-girl culture are captured through the dancers’ use of video productions.

The difference between aspects of hip hop culture and club cultures are important to address in relation to works about popular music and the media. Thornton (1996) suggests in a study of club cultures and popular dance that *subcultural capital* is acquired through members situating themselves in opposition to the mainstream. Rose makes a similar argument about the function of *status* in hip hop culture that speaks more directly to the specificities of street dance cultures. According to Rose, although participants in hip hop culture are constantly battling each other for prestige and respect, the game is never won. If someone is achieving status in one moment, they can easily be taken down in their next battle, thus there is a limit to longevity in status (although this is a contested point now that there are old school pioneers that have earned a fair degree of sustainable status with younger generations). Due to the polyphony of competing voices, there is also no agreement that someone has indeed come out on top. Rose writes: “hip

hop remains a never-ending battle for status, prestige, and group adoration, always in formation, always contested, and never fully achieved” (Rose 1996: 36). This insight reveals the ongoing tensions within the cultural forms of hip hop culture. Although Rose does not explicitly make the connection here, this observation is useful when considering the role of the battle in b-boy and b-girl culture.

I compare these two models of Rose and Thornton to consider how meaning is generated for dancers within hip hop culture. Do dancers evaluate their worth and meanings through their relationship to the media, their relationships with each other, or both? Rose’s analysis suggests that in hip hop culture, meanings are often generated through the interactions between dancers. I am interested in how these meanings are spread and understood globally. How do dancers contest and negotiate meanings transnationally?

My study investigates how meanings are generated and negotiated and asks what role traveling dancers play in status developments of inclusions, exclusions, translations and expressions. To do so, I borrow from the studies of popular music. I will provide a limited overview of various applications of the term *scenes*. Scene is a word in everyday discourse that is inclusive to both dance and music practices. The writing about breaking implies an even larger category of various dance practices converging in a shared space (including popping, locking and other forms of hip hop dance). The work dealing with popular music has significantly contributed to specific uses of the word *scene* in popular cultural studies.

Three different types of music scenes identified are local, translocal and virtual scenes (Peterson and Bennett 2005). In an overview of the various studies utilizing the concept of music scenes, Peterson and Bennett identify Straw (1991) as the first writer to address music scenes as an academic concept. Straw defines a scene as a “cultural space” where “a range of

musical practices coexist” (494). Translocal scenes are differentiated from local scenes because participants are “also connected with groups of kindred spirits many miles away” (Peterson and Bennett 2004: 9). Furthermore, this second category of scenes as defined by Peterson and Bennett “refers to widely scattered local scenes drawn into regular communication around ...music and lifestyle” (6-7). My study will attempt to theorize how these meanings are developed and negotiated.

Whether or not a local scene develops communication streams with other scenes is difficult to determine, especially considering the organic nature of many local scenes. That is to say, they have fleeting qualities, often coming into existence, perhaps growing in rather isolated ways for years before translocal networks form and sometimes disappearing without a trace as people move on. Also, virtual communications are often employed by both local and translocal scenes. These categories seem very difficult to hermetically seal off from one another in dealings with popular dance. Scenes are not created and sustained through the sum of their participants, each bring an affiliation of contacts with various environments, experiences and communications. Those participating in local scenes do so with varying degrees of commitment and for varying degrees of time.

Section 3: Performances have texts

The field of performance studies formed out of attempts to make dance and theatre studies relevant (see Bial 2004). Popular dance in relationship to institutions has been questioned since modern dance. However, the modern dance movement is still linked to notions of high art aesthetics. For example, there are television shows such as *So You Think You can*

Dance that herald modern dance as the highest form of popular dance. Dancers trained in modern dance tend to move through the dance categories quickly and are received as the most versatile dancers even with little to no training, understanding or ability in street dance forms such as b-boying, b-girling, popping, locking, and hip hop dance.

Early theorizations about dance began to compare dance to texts (see Goellner and Murphy 1995). Later, hefty critiques were lodged against the reading of dancers' bodies as texts. For example, Antonin Artaud (a playwright and early performance theorist) was critiqued for being quick to theorize dancers as texts when they were of *other* ethnicities (see Bial 2004). Frith (1996) suggests that performance studies writers have begun to analyze live performances in ways that are non-textual. Here I want to examine how performances *have* texts. Thornton (1996) suggests that dances that need to be embodied rather than just bought do not circulate internationally. Thomas (1993) suggests that there is no universal system for archiving dances. More specifically, I want to examine how b-boys/b-girls have archives of their dance that circulate transnationally and generate meanings along the way, whether this is through capturing negotiations between dancers through videos or negotiating new meanings through the circulation of videos.

Music videos have received varying degrees of attention in academic analysis (Goodwin 1992). However, to my knowledge, there has been no consideration of how underground b-boy/b-girl videos circulated in the 1990s. What can underground videos tell us about the circulation of music and attachment to various lifestyle cultures? These underground videos and traveling dancers circulate music, dance, and fashion to new places. Goodwin also draws attention to a sociological concern to avoid fixating on the music video and by doing so ignoring an in depth analysis of the music and musical context. Likewise, with this study, I want to focus

on what the underground b-boy/b-girl video production, distribution and circulation practices suggest about the negotiations of transnational b-boy/b-girl dance communications. A future area of study would include the analysis of the overlapping relationships between music, dance and fashion in these transnational communications.

This study's emphasizes how the transnational circulation of texts in the 1990s can be used to map the movements of traveling and touring dancers. How do the video texts hold within them the negotiations, resistance, and exchanges of meaning in global street dance culture? Straw (2005) suggests that each new artefact negotiates with the context in which it seeks to emerge. I'm interested in how the studies of underground b-boy/b-girl video archives (texts) capture the conversations between dancers and battles and demonstrate how b-boys and b-girls negotiate with the context in which they seek to emerge through video production. This is a valuable concern for the emerging field of popular dance because in b-boy/b-girl culture there are video artefacts that provide an archive and (con)text for these fleeting performances. The focus, either on theoretical abstractions or local ethnography (interviews and participant observation), in studies about breakdancing has missed the larger context of distribution channels amongst participants in various nations through new media technologies.

Conclusion

The 1990s b-boy/b-girl underground culture requires a new analysis that can contribute to the study of popular dance. Banes (1985) presents the eras *before* and *after* media. I will introduce another era. Rather than thinking about the time periods of the dance in terms of *before* and *after*, I would like to suggest a historical update. In this new model, there is the time

before mainstream media attention, the time *during* mainstream media attention and the time *after* the mainstream media lost interest and b-boy/b-girls created their own media channels. In the present moment, we are in an age that can be considered a combination of mainstream media attention towards the dance and alternative media productions by dancers.

This chapter dealt with the three dominant themes in various disciplines that inform this project. I questioned the absence of literature about the unpopular period of b-boy/b-girl history and questioned the methodological and theoretical assumptions in the eyes of cultural theorists. I attempted to explore how global dance communication meanings negotiate with the contexts where they seek to emerge through video production. I also consider the usefulness of examining how performances have texts.

Chapter 3

Methodology: Mixed-qualitative research and street dance history

Introduction

The last chapter referred briefly to the methodological approaches chosen by writers of popular dance. Many of the most detailed studies of b-boying/b-girling used ethnographic methods to analyze the meanings of the dance form through its socio-cultural context (for example the works of Banes 1985, Kopytko 1986, Rivera 2003 and Ogaz 2006). In this project, I use a mixed-method approach that is based in an overarching qualitative research strategy. Mixed-method approaches are used to provide a more “robust” analysis (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick 2006). When addressing transnational networks and attempting to move beyond cross-cultural ethnography, in a constant negotiation and *simultaneous* interrogation of self and other, my mixed-method approach provides the tools necessary to examine multiple and conflicting perspectives.

My positions as a critical humanist and insider to the lifestyle culture I am studying are interrelated and will be addressed first (and I will return to these concerns later on in this Chapter). Critical humanism, according to Ken Plummer, has “five central criteria” (2001: 14). These criteria include the following attributes:

First, it must pay tribute to *human subjectivity and creativity* – showing how individuals respond to social constraints and actively assemble social worlds. It must deal with concrete human experiences – talk, feelings, actions – through their *social and economic organization* (and not just their inner, psychic or biological structuring). It must show a naturalistic ‘*intimate familiarity*’ with such experiences – abstractions untempered by close involvement are ruled out. There must be self-awareness by the sociologist of their ultimate *moral and political role* in moving towards a social structure in which there is less exploitation, oppression and injustice and more creativity, diversity and equality. Recognizing an inherent ambivalence and ambiguity in human life..., it walks a tightrope

between a situated ethics of care (recognition, tolerance, respect for persons, love) and a situated ethics of justice (retribution, equality). And finally, in all of this it espouses an epistemology of *radical, pragmatic empiricism* which takes seriously the idea that knowing – always limited and partial – should be grounded in experience...(Plummer 2001: 14)

This synopsis of a critical humanistic social science recognizes the need of the social scientist to “walk a tightrope.” My research dances a fine line between a dialectic of experience and interpretation based on my insider status as a b-girl. Being an insider to a lifestyle culture requires an explanation about what assumptions this embodied experience and identification bring. The utterance of “I was there” is not new to anthropological accounts, and has come under serious critique during the crisis of ethnographic representation (see Marcus and Fischer 1986, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Geertz 1988, Clifford 1988). For Clifford, participant observation has been best understood when “reformulated in hermeneutic terms as a dialectic of experience and interpretation” (34). Likewise, my concern about analysis from an insider perspective, which shares with participant observation trepidations about the meaning of embodied experience, requires a dialectic of experience and interpretation. An insider perspective should also stress reflexivity about how far the claim that “I was there” can serve as the backbone, or at least backdrop for research results and analysis.

This study does not *rely* on my former experiences as a b-girl. This past year I have conducted original research about this subject matter using a mixed-method qualitative approach. However, I am *informed* by many years of dancing (training), traveling, touring and living in various cities, competing in and judging at b-boy/b-girl events, performing at hip hop events, learning history from personal conversations with pioneers of hip hop culture alongside local pioneers and everyday practitioners in Canadian cities. I have also taught b-boy/b-girl classes (evaluating and implementing different strategies for sharing the values and aesthetics of street

dance), organized hip hop events and spoke at community events about the value of b-boy/b-girl culture and history. These experiences have brought me into a subset of critical humanist perspective, where I pay tribute to human creativity and possess an intimate familiarity with my subject.

Section 1 introduces my mixed-method approach including the use of various qualitative data sources. Section 2 describes the stages of my research process including: finding participants, conducting interviews, completing archival research, analyzing videotexts and reviewing all of these materials again during further analysis. Aspects of my ethical considerations will be addressed here. However, Section 3 provides a more detailed discussion of these concerns. I consider ethical questions including the use of underground b-boy/b-girl videos, my role as a former b-girl and issues of privacy and integrity.

Section 1: The mixed-methods qualitative approach: data sources

My rationale for using a mixed-method qualitative research approach is to examine the few traces left of a historical past. I use a combination of methods including interviews, participant observation, archival research and video analysis to examine this topic. Not all of these methods are weighted the same. For example, my focus was directed at the analysis of underground video artefacts from the 1990s. These documents present the most accurate depiction of the decade under consideration. The study of these videos was used in combination with interviews. The interviews were conducted in part to corroborate the history presented in the videos, and interviews were also used to determine factors about the production, distribution and reception of the underground videos within the culture. Lastly, newspaper archives were

examined to substantiate the history presented in the underground b-boy/b-girl videos and to confirm the fluctuating popularity of the dance form over time.

This study's various data sources helped to answer aspects of my research questions, as well as contributing to a dialectic of analysis, corroboration and revisions. One of the general distinctions between my data sources is that some were accessed through *proximate* means and others through *mediate* means. Proximate access involves the direct observation of actions and mediate access includes the indirect observations researchers made through the study of traces (Scott 1990). The video artefacts and newspaper archives I am using for this research are mediate sources. The interviews with dancers provide the proximate sources for the investigation of my hypothesis. However, I conducted interviews with b-boys and b-girls to trace historical evidence about a time period already passed therefore I use direct observation to study traces. Likewise, the underground videos involve an element of indirect access to the decade considered through a visual and audio source that allows for the observation of actions.

My overarching intention was to begin an exploratory retrieval of b-boy/b-girl history from the 1990s. I started with the hypothesis that dancers were not only practicing the dance in North America during the unpopular period, but also building transnational networks with other dancers. Conveniently, my experience as a b-girl (who was actively dancing with other people in the 1990s) informed my awareness that I would likely find evidence of this. However, to empirically investigate this history, I began interviewing dancers that currently practice the dance form. Interviews were my first data source employed, although I returned to interviews in the dialectic feedback process throughout this research. I asked b-boys and b-girls about the history of the dance and their participation in the dance during this time period.

In my prior experiences as a dancer, I became aware that the street dance traditions of b-boying/b-girling place an emphasis on the value of oral traditions and the knowledge of local, regional, national and international histories that is acquired through conversations. This dominant cultural tradition in the lifestyle culture meant that the interview process added greatly to my understanding about the dance history and led me to other methodological tools such as the analysis of videos. I learned from interviews that transnational networks were not only building during this time period, but also that many dancers had an understanding at the local level of international influences and the transnational dance networks. I started to question in my interpretive strategy how some dancers had acquired their knowledge of a collective transnational history and when this acquisition of knowledge began to develop. These questions formed subset levels of enquiry that also required more interviews and analysis.

A second method used to retrieve history was the collection of mediate sources from the time period including newspaper articles, archived local television shows and magazine articles. This approach enabled me to fill in the history surrounding this time period for a robust picture (as mentioned in Chapter 1). I used newspaper archives to situate this decade historically and to contextualize developments in the street dance culture within larger trends in popular culture.

The last source used to retrieve historical data about the dance form involved the analysis of underground b-boy/b-girl videos. This was the method that I weighted the heaviest in my analysis and write-up. My hypothesis was that the underground videos had an important function in the culture during the 1990s. This working proposition was developed from my previous experiences in the dance scene. This particular question required an analysis of the videos and also involved returning to the interview process, as well as returning to my interview field notes and transcripts, to generate some answers about spectatorship of said videos.

All of the sources I have mentioned above contributed to my research process. This mixed-method approach allowed me to attempt a robust analysis using aspects of triangulation, corroboration and feedback in my dialectic of interpretation and experience. I will explain these aspects in more detail as they relate to the various stages of this project.

Section 2: Stages of research

As explained in the previous section, I am using a variety of methods in my qualitative research practice that are both proximate and mediate. Scott argues that the “general principles involved in handling documents” are the same as “those involved in any other area of social research [including interviews and participant observation]” (1990: 1). However, he also suggests that diverse techniques also need to be considered by the distinguishing characteristics of each approach. To delineate the precise attributes of each approach, this section focuses in turn on the three major research methods used in this mixed-method qualitative approach: interviews (and participant observation), archival research (including the study of newspaper articles and television interviews) and video analysis.

Interviews

I conducted thirty-one interviews with b-boys and b-girls. Seven of the participants were female. Twelve participants came from Toronto originally, six from New York City, three from California, five from various parts of Canada (including two from the surrounding area of Toronto), and five were from other areas in the United States. The dancers were multi-ethnic.

The youngest person interviewed was twenty-one and the oldest was forty-one. All but nine were dancing in the 1990s. The four participants from Toronto that were not dancing in this time period were asked questions directed at their knowledge about this time period, and how such knowledge was acquired.

Although I used a small sample, I chose dancers from a range of cities, levels of experience and status in local dance scenes or the wider international b-boy/b-girl networks. I did not choose the dancers to represent their gender, ethnicity, age or ability but rather to trace the history of the dance through as many versionings of the past as possible. I started this process by making a list of dancers known to me through my past experiences as a dancer (ethical considerations about my past involvement will be considered in more detail in Section 4). In this list I included people that were friends, acquaintances and dancers that I did not know directly but had seen on videos, in competitions or had heard about through other dancers. The initial list included about seventy-five names of dancers. As I revised this list, I tried to select people that I had the least amount of contact with in my previous experiences as a b-girl. I only kept a few names on the new list of dancers that were known to me personally. I did this with dancers that I knew had extensive dance careers and knowledge of the time period.

I explicitly told dancers that they were under no obligation to participate in this study and that they could withdraw their participation in the study at any time including after their interviews were over. I did not put pressure on the dancers to participate. For example, I approached at least twenty dancers over e-mail that did not return my initial request, or that said yes to the initial appeal but never responded to a follow-up request for a telephone interview. As I was observing dancers in various spaces (to be discussed later in this section) I came across

dancers who were not known to me previously and I took every advantage to interview those dancers that were willing and had time to spare in these environments.

The dancers were contacted in person, over e-mail or over the telephone. Interviews were also conducted through these various methods. When contacting dancers, I found that e-mail was a preferable method for dancers as they could choose to respond at their convenience or not at all (as mentioned previously). Some dancers expressed a preference for phone interviews over e-mail correspondence. The dancers contacted by e-mail had time to prepare before the interview, see some of the questions I would ask them about, review my *Research Ethics Board form* (included in the *Appendix*) and give consent either verbally or over e-mail for the interview. Some of the dancers who were interviewed over the phone and in person were verbally told about the study and consented to participate.

Most of the interviews were conducted one on one between January and March of 2006. These interviews provided some shape to my enquiries about how dancers perceive their history, their valuing of history and their relationships to other dancers. Also, these interviews answered key concerns about the underground videos including: dancers recalled what videos they saw during this time period, the significance of the videos and the availability and access to videos. Although most of the interviews were conducted one on one, I also interviewed crew members while their peers listened.

This decision was made to provide convenience and comfort for the dancers. The dancers were interviewed beside their practice circle and this approach did not put excess restraints on their time as they were engaged in performances and cyphers. The value I received from this group dynamic was the ability to ask more survey-type questions to a larger group of dancers. None of the responses given by any one dancer triggered comments or interruptions

from other dancers. Occasionally a group member would get bored or have something else to do and in this structure they felt comfortable to walk away from the cluster of dancers and come back at their leisure to answer questions.

All of the interviews were open-ended and qualitative in nature. I prepared for each interview by customizing questions based on several general categories. The following is a list of questions that I prepared myself before the interviews to determine the questions that I would ask:

1. What city the dancers were from (this affected questions about place and locality)
2. How well known they are as dancers in their local scene and in the international b-boy/b-girl community (their status in the community informed by my insider knowledge of these networks – to be discussed in section 4)
3. How long the person had been dancing (this affected questions about the 1990s and how those questions were phrased)

One of the primary sources of data for interpretive approaches is “people, and their interpretations, perceptions, meanings and understandings...” (Mason 2002: 56). Mason suggests that a researcher may choose to conduct interviews because data cannot be feasibly obtained through other methods. Furthermore, Turner (1969) suggests that interviews are needed to acquire an “adequate understanding” of the meaning of “movements and words” for social participants (7). The following list served as a general guideline for the questions that I asked participants as part of this qualitative strategy:

1. What year did you start dancing?

2. What was the first time that you remember seeing b-boying/b-girling? (live/video)
3. What videos did you see? When? Where did they come from? (ie. Store, other dancers, etc.)
4. What events have you gone to? (include dates, years) Where have you traveled with the dance?
5. Where did you practice?
6. What dance styles have been the biggest influences on your style?

The interviews were conducted with a variety of styles based on proximity and the depth of questioning required. When I used the Internet as a method for interviews, I acquired more general survey answers about the videos dancers saw in the 1990s. Using this method allowed me to contact dancers from different areas of North America to get a sense of the variety of influences and distribution channels of this time period.

Over the phone interviews were more structured in format. I asked dancers specific questions about the perceived influence of Toronto on various locales including Los Angeles, the Bay Area and New York City. The interviews done in person were more in-depth, open-ended and tended to focus on local experiences. Interviews done over the phone were more difficult because I could not read the body language of the dancer for signs of boredom or discomfort. To combat this, I attempted to keep these interviews short unless the enthusiasm in the voice of the dancer assured me that they were engaged enough to continue. Guidelines for the interviews are included in the *Appendix* for further considerations.

From the personal narratives of dancers, I began to trace trajectories of knowledge and influences across nations. For example, many of the b-boys/b-girls had learned from dancers that were originally influenced by the styles developing in other countries. The use of interviews allowed me to trace historical lineages and mergers within dance scenes with larger communication networks.

I interviewed dancers over the same months that I was reading the literature about the dance, studying archives and analyzing underground b-boy/b-girl videos. This allowed my research questions to evolve over time during my interactions with the dancers. Also, after each interview I reviewed the transcripts and would continually reassess the data before returning to more interviews and conversations with dancers. My mixed-method approach is loosely designed so that the interviews overlapped with other methods employed.

The limitation of this approach is that the overlap in methods and interview strategies made the process extremely inter-subjective. I trusted my insider perspective and accumulated knowledge on b-boy/b-girl culture and the codes of ethics among different styles of dancers and this leads the project towards an implicitly autoethnographic approach. I also trusted my peer group of fellow dancers and crew members to continue dialogues with me about the meaning of the dance. The benefit I experienced with this interview approach was a transformation of my research project that grew out of a constant reprocessing and reevaluating of results. This constant reprocessing mixed with my engagement with fellow dancers through the interview strategy helped me to combat this implicitly autoethnographic approach by constantly reintroducing the stories, memories and answers provided by other dancers. Also, I was able to check my interpretations about the role of underground videos against the perspectives of various dancers as I developed the definition for imagined affinities.

Participant observation

Most of my initial understandings about the dance (and relationships between dancers) developed through observations and participation in various dance experiences. This included nonverbal communications essential to dance knowledge but often difficult to articulate. My use of this method stems from a position “based on the premise that these kinds of settings, situations and interactions ‘reveal data’ in multidimensional ways (Mason 2002: 85).

I conducted participant observation in New York City and Toronto. When dancers that I interviewed invited me to observe an event, practice or video production then I would conduct participant observation. In New York City, I attended a dance studio where I observed dancers preparing for a show (with choreography sequences). I learned early foundational dance moves of b-boying from dance pioneers (including an earlier dance form called freestyling). I watched dancers in the act of making a video on the history of freestyling and observed interactions between dancers as they took breaks from rehearsal and video making practices. I also observed shows performed in subway stations including the interactions between dancers while they waited to perform. Immediately after these encounters, I would sketch out my field notes involving the literal data generated at these events.

In Toronto, I attended an outdoor community event including performances and workshops by Toronto b-boys and b-girls, as well as krumpers on tour from Los Angeles. I also attended an indoor evening b-boy/b-girl event. Just prior to this event, I observed the event organizers preparing for the night, as well as practicing and stretching. As a former dancer with a sense of familiarity in all of these environments, I used participant observation to explore

various interpretive strategies. For example, my use of detailed field notes helped me to formulate these experiences into a new context (the written word) and prepare this generated data for an interpretive analysis of the dance.

Newspaper archives

I collected newspaper articles from archives in New York City and Toronto. The purpose of gathering these sources was twofold. I wanted to contextualize my interviews with evidence or data that surfaced in media accounts. The evidence included representations of b-boys/b-girls and their dance tours, shows and performances. I wanted to address issues of popularity and media coverage about the dance (the reception of dance in popular media sources). I paid particular attention to the proliferation and absences in the media coverage about the dance in these two cities.

In New York City, I collected over fifty newspaper citations about the dance (a large portion from the 1980s and a few sources from the early 1990s). I compared this to a collection of around twenty sources on Toronto b-boys (most of these sources appeared in the 1990s). I relied on computer databases for Toronto available through Brock University's library and the already-thorough excavations and collections compiled at the New York Public Library special collections on dance. Examining archives provided a supplementary role to the other methods initially but this type of mixed-methods approach allowed me to return to this source with more weight in the final analysis. This fluctuating shift in the weight and priority given to various methods during the course of this study was used to attempt a more holistic overview.

Through out the study I fluctuated in the weight given to various methods and this likely generated only one of many possible constructions about the social universe analyzed. As such, the limitations of this mixed-method approach are acknowledged. The benefit to this approach was that it provided an informed impression of the increases and decreases in coverage about the dance over time, while simultaneously corroborating narratives of various dancers performing in different shows and tours.

Newspaper archives and journal articles supply this study with some corroboration of dates for the purpose of building historical timelines in my field notes. Thus, they were initially used primarily for triangulation and later were re-examined as part of my interpretive strategy. Urquía (2003) suggests that rather than treating triangulation as though it can provide an “objective description of reality,” there is more value added in recognizing the benefits of a combination of methods. This offers researchers various original insights. In terms of this study, the mixed-method approach demonstrated the conflicting accounts that various methods provide. For example, newspaper archives suggest that the dance disappeared and then re-emerged. However, the interviews with dancers and underground b-boy/b-girl videos suggested otherwise. Thus, I was able to use the newspaper archives to access the public attention towards the dance, and the interviews and videos to access the insider knowledge of b-boys and b-girls on the existence of the dance form.

The dancers in the culture have a very different understanding of the dance to journalists in the popular press. I interviewed some dancers after I had studied the newspapers archives and asked them about their interpretations of how the media had covered the dance. This is an example of the dialectic between experience and interpretation that informed my mixed method approach. The dancers responded to their interpretation of the media accounts. This indicated a

diverging perspective between two of my methods. Dancers felt that the media was uninterested in the dance and placed little value on a dance that b-boys and b-girls considered very meaningful. Also, one dancer pointed out that the dance is easy to parody and make fun of because of the humor and comedy in the style of various dancers, as well as the language used to describe the dance styles.

Video artefacts

I chose to study videos because they provided essential data about the transnational networks and the meanings of these relationships for dancers. Secondly, videos provided one of the best traces of a historical past that otherwise is only accounted for in detail through oral traditions and the memories of dancers. This allowed me to access more information about the transnational nature of the dance form through the initiatives of dancers/video makers who traveled internationally and interviewed dancers from France, Brazil, Japan, etc. during the 1990s. There are limitations and disadvantages to this mediate source that will be discussed below.

I analyzed the videos for their historical value as documents providing information on the dance lifestyles and networks of the 1990s. When examining the videos as documents, I looked for absences and fissures in the texts, as well as the literal and present information generated from viewing the texts. Dancers edited these tapes and thus they had personal value judgments and aesthetic preferences within both the filming and post-production processes. I asked myself why dancers chose to include the footage that they did, or edit the videos in the way that they did. I looked at how the videos could be “used to verify or contextualize or clarify personal

recollections” (Mason 2002: 108). For example, I asked the following questions: What is included literally in the video document? What does this tell us about the tastes and values of the dancers that produced the videos? Whose narratives are emphasized? Who are the supporting dancers, institutions and technologies? Who is represented in the videos? What do dancers say about their dance styles, local histories, values and beliefs? What is implied about their value judgments and aesthetic tastes through what is literally said and what is absent?

Many writers have considered documents and artefacts for their value in providing biographical narratives (Hoskins 1998, Plummer 2001, Mason 2002). I evaluated the videos as artefacts and products. However, I also viewed videos as documents that provide evidence about the history of the dance. My video artefacts are created by dancers (many of whom were my social informants) who also participated in the creation of the dance performances found within the videos. I consider the videotexts from this perspective, while using interviews and participant observation to consolidate how these videos are produced, circulated and received within the dance culture.

To determine the underground b-boy/b-girl videos that would be studied, I began with the interviews I had conducted with dancers. During the interviews, I asked dancers what videos were circulating during this time period. I asked them what videos they had seen and when they had first seen dancers from different locales. Often they first saw dancers from other places through videos so I asked them which videos they saw.

I chose to examine all of the videos mentioned by dancers because there were just fifteen different videos that were continuously named. Although as a dancer in the culture I was exposed to other videos, I only used the videos sourced during this limited sample of interviews. Of the videos the dancers saw: five of the videos fit the Travel Logs category¹ (from American

dancers mainly), six were videos of events (from Germany, England and the United States), two videos were crew videos (from the Bay Area, California) and two were solo videos (from New York City's Ken Swift and Germany's Storm). I only used videos that were explicitly referenced in interviews for this part of the study.

Review of materials, field notes and analysis

Frequently as I wrote up my field notes from interviews and observations I discovered that later on in my memory as I was working through my analysis certain data would stand out. This emerging data might be an occurrence during the participant observation or interview that had not seemed important at the time but became more so in the analysis. The obvious data made the strongest initial impacts, but minute seemingly non-details would surface later and take on new significance. A limitation of this mixed-method qualitative research approach is that this relies both on my own impressions and also on my ability to determine what constitutes data in field notes.

Part of these issues involved my data collection methods. I derived data from interviews in a literal way initially and then later returned for interpretations during various revisions. This means that I first focused on what the dancers said, performed and enacted. I also wrote field notes about aspects of space, place and time that were literal, rather than collecting data at this stage in an interpretive way. Mason outlines three data collection methods including literal, interpretive and reflexive (2002). In the literal approach, the dialogue and other information is gathered in a way most analogous, I'd argue, to a translation. I would ask the social participant interpretive or literal questions. In the process of analyzing the data, I myself would take on an

interpretative engagement as a researcher and test this new information against the experiences forming through my mixed-methods approach and former dance experiences. I would reexamine the data with various theoretical lenses and this is often where adjustments to the analysis would be made based in part on the impressions of my field notes about the events and interviews.

Section 3: Ethical considerations

Use of underground videos and newspaper archives

The use of images and films will become increasingly important for cultural studies in the future (Tilley 2001). Visual images can be used to corroborate and reveal data, as well as to provide a means for more transparent research results (through the use of videos in academic accounts). Although this strategy is ethically messy and sometimes technologically distracting, this is also a reality of the complex structures and multivocality that we are inundated with in global mediated cultures and lifestyles. Ideally, my future work will incorporate more visual evidence in the production of arguments surrounding transnational dance networks to better express and demonstrate my methodological choices, data generation, interpretative analysis and conclusions.

In my study, I considered the ethical implications of using underground b-boy/b-girl videos intended for a b-boy/b-girl audience. I decided to study these videos because they were commodities that were sold, circulated and distributed through dancers, stores, and eventually the World Wide Web. When discussing the materials found in the videos, I focus only on the names of dancers that produced the videos or took part in aspects of the production process.

My role as a b-girl

Bennett (2002) suggests that in current work on popular music and youth studies there is a general lack of analysis over ‘insider’ knowledge, and methodological transparency surrounding issues of access and insider identifications. I have performed as a street dancer (b-girl) for most of my adult years. This includes teaching classes, throwing b-boy/b-girl events in London (Ontario), judging events across Ontario, traveling and competing across North America and being actively involved in the Canadian hip hop scene more generally. Many of the contacts for this study were first sought through the networks of dancers I became acquainted with during my dancing years. I have already discussed in the interview section how I worked around these contacts when selecting participants for the research.

Many of the dancers I interviewed have seen me dance before or during the course of this study. This affected the dialogues taking place during the interviews. One of the tendencies presented in a previous study where participants assumed affinities with the researcher, due to similar career positions and experiences, led to the researcher feeling that “she sometimes gained responses lacking the explicitness and/or detail necessary to bear her interpretations... Respondents invite[d] her to draw on her background knowledge rather than spelling out what they were saying” (Skeggs 2002: 351). This happened occasionally in my interview process. Dancers assumed I had a working knowledge of where events took place, names of dancers, aspects of the dance culture and an understanding about different dance styles. However, the depth of conversations allowed for a more thorough analysis.

When dancers assumed that I had knowledge about b-boying/b-girling, whether this was knowledge of the names of dancers, knowledge of events or aspects of the culture, I asked myself why this was occurring. Sometimes dancers had seen me at an event they were referring to so their assumptions about my knowledge made sense. However, other times there was no relationship between us on which to base assumptions about my previous knowledge of dancers from all over the world. I began to ask myself in the research project why dancers assumed that I had a working knowledge of various transnational occurrences through my involvements and participation as a b-girl. For example, one dancer in New York City assumed I knew offhand the dance styles of specific dancers from various countries and I did know their names and styles. The results of this will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

I avoided research questions that would involve aesthetic tastes or value judgments about various dance styles. I did this to avoid having my 'insider' biases or b-boy/b-girl fan opinions factor into the study. I also did not interview anyone from the cities where I taught classes. The dialectic process involved in conducting this research certainly danced a fine line between my experiences and interpretations as a dancer and my experiences and interpretations as a researcher.

Also, as a University educated white woman originally from the Prairie region of Canada, I must speak to concerns about my ethnic position and what Dyer (1997) has called "the matter of whiteness". My relationships in the dance community have involved an ongoing process where my peers teach me about what it means to be privileged or not, white or non-white, educated or not (through conventional schooling), etc. I know through these relationships that I, like everyone I have ever met, make many assumptions based on my cultural background, social conditioning and negotiation of gender, age, sexuality and lifestyle choices. I can only profusely

thank my interviewees and fellow dancers for guiding me through issues of racism as experienced on a daily basis by people in North American culture that are non-white, whether this racism is implicit or explicit. I am a student of post-colonial theory, not an expert or authority on these issues and I am a student of a dance movement that is lead primarily by dancers that are non-white.

I continue to identify as a b-girl and practice a dance form that I consider to be very meaningful. I had access to many interviews because of my insider status and this identification has led me to a very cautionary and reluctant position in quoting my informants directly. In my experience, many b-boys and b-girls have a very skeptical relationship about the sincerity of those with a desire to study the culture for a day, month or year conveniently during the same years that the dance is popular or considered trendy in popular culture. Not all dancers feel this way, but this is my position as well and thus, I dance a fine line with this study around these implicit values that I possess.

I felt a responsibility to get the story 'right' if I was going to quote dancers directly that I had interviewed and I feel that this project's time duration and interpretative qualities did not permit such a naming. In a culture where status, egos and competitions have real and embodied effects, this choice inevitably was my own. In this study I refer to participants that I interviewed by the city they are from and their gender. This decision was made on my part as a researcher because of my comfort level at naming and quoting dancers out of the context of our interviews. I trusted that the interviewees known to me previously were honest enough to tell me whether or not they felt comfortable participating in this study.

This chapter has given an overview of my mixed-method qualitative strategies, research plan and ethical issues. The next two chapters are devoted to the research I conducted and my interpretive analysis of this material. Chapter 4 examines the three major ways that dancers communicated transnationally during the early to mid-1990s. Chapter 5 provides a more detailed analysis and application of theories to the research discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Transnational networks between dancers in the 1990s: Traveling dancers and circulating video artefacts

Introduction

This chapter's overarching argument is that the three major transnational channels that dancers used to communicate with each other during the early to mid-1990s were: touring, competitions and videos. Of these, the first two - tours and competitions – involved dancers traveling to new places (the movement of dancers through space). The other method of communication included the production and circulation of 'underground' b-boy/b-girl videos. These transnational communications demonstrate the intersection of video artefacts, travel and dance. For example, the distribution of video artefacts through various locales was initially made possible through the travels of dancers. This chapter, then, suggests new correlations between street dance, travel, video technologies and popular culture. The ideas put forward in this chapter are based on my analysis of interview data and video artefacts.

During the 1990s, traveling dancers began to experiment with the use of video technologies in their transnational communications. This study explores the developing role of videos in street dance networks. Advancements in accessible music technologies for the development of local music scenes have been considered in the past (for example: Lull 1995, Laing 1997). Also, accessible video technologies and their effects on the experiences of skateboarders have been considered (Borden 2001). However, accessible video technologies that have enabled dancers to develop new forms of popular street dance communications have yet to be examined.

This chapter is organized into three major sections. The first section examines the existence of touring street dancers who built transnational networks and I would argue also served as gatekeepers between various local scenes. Section 2 covers other types of travel by street dancers in various countries including ‘pilgrimages’ and competitions. These travels facilitated the development of networks between dancers. Section 3 outlines the instrumental role of videos in the development of larger and more extended communication channels between dancers.

Section 1: Touring b-boys and b-girls from New York City

According to various dancers that I interviewed in New York City, in the early to mid-1980s New York dancers were flown around the world to perform. When the dance form had reached its saturation point with public tastes most of these tours ended. However, dancers who performed shows onstage had become accustomed to a regime of training and income that qualified them as professional dancers. They were making their livings through commercials, television appearances and performances of dance onstage. They were also creating choreography, preparing specific musical accompaniments for shows and adhering to the training schedule of a lifestyle involving dance performances.

Many of the dancers featured in the early 1980s movies, commercials, television appearances and tours were teenagers or young adults. One dancer that I interviewed who was actively participating in the culture during this time period told me that the media often fixated on one or two charismatic dancers and turned them into the stars of the culture. In an interview I conducted with another New York dancer, he pointed out that during this time period, many of

the older dancers from New York City had tried to unionize their efforts to demand better pay. Also, some of the other dancers recalled that the younger b-boys were often exploited because they were not aware of how much money was being made off of their efforts. Often the dancers featured in the early movies, commercials and tours were the younger dancers that asked for less money. When b-boying/b-girling became less in vogue as a trend in popular taste, they experienced a disappearance of their major source of income, status and celebrity.

Many of these dancers continued to practice their craft as they grew into adults. They had learned a valuable lesson about the treatment of their art form by the media. This led to changes in street dance terminology that spread globally throughout the 1990s. For example, dancers verbally took back the earlier terms of 'b-boying' and 'b-girling' rather than the media label of 'breakdancing' (Rivera (2003) also notes this shift). In my own personal experience as a b-girl in the late 1990s, I recall dancers from New York sharing this shift in terminology with Toronto dancers as a lesson in overt and self-conscious resistance against the forces of media exploitations¹.

According to newspaper archives and local television shows from New York City, the renowned street dancers had begun to perform with professional dance troupes in other countries. For example, Mr. Wiggles performed with a ballet company in Mexico in the early 1990s². Dancers had the opportunity to perform both in the United States as well as in other countries. For example, groups like the Rhythm Technicians and the Ghetto Original Dance Company began to perform in New York City, as well as touring different parts of the world.

One of the New York City dancers recalled to me in an interview that the Ghetto Original Dance Company performed at the Harbourfront Center in Toronto during one of these early 1990s tours. Footage from this performance just recently surfaced on *youtube*³ this year and

corroborated this story. The underground video footage from this time also captures performances of the Ghetto Original Dance Company in places as diverse as Sao Paulo and Jerusalem. This Dance Company included the participation of many well-known New York dancers within the b-boy/b-girl scene such as Ken Swift, Honey Rockwell, Mr. Wiggles, and Flo Master (as corroborated through my interviews, the underground videos and local newspaper articles from New York City).

According to the underground b-boy/b-girl videos of this time period, b-boying/b-girling and other hip hop street dance forms like popping and locking had become a dynamic part of popular culture in countries like Japan, Canada, France and Germany (see *Seven Gems* videos and *Mr. Wiggles Travel Logs*). The interest in street dance art forms in these countries made the tours successful through popular demand. Dancers from various countries wanted to see the styles of dancers from New York City, especially those featured in the early documentaries and movies.

In my interviews, as well as in the underground videos analyzed, one of the most valuable experiences that the touring dancers expressed was the opportunity to meet other dancers from all over the world. When the New York City dancers traveled to different countries to perform onstage, they also danced on the streets, in hotel lobbies, in subways and at local hip hop shows. This gave them an opportunity to dance with (and not just for) dancers from other countries.

In the videos they made, traveling dancers asked local dancers about their scenes' histories. These questions included general categories such as: Who were the first dancers there? How did the dance style come to the country? Who were the biggest influences that came to their country? And how did they first learn about hip hop? (see *Mr. Wiggles Video Magazines*

Vol. 1-3). In answer to their questions, the dancers found that the 1980s movies were not always the source of local dancers' first exposures to the dance. Many b-boys and b-girls saw dancers touring or traveling through their countries in the early 1980s (source: *7 Gems Video Travel Magazines*).

One dancer from the Bronx pointed out in an interview with me that many dancers first learned the street dance styles from members of American GI forces that were stationed in their countries. Members of the army were often from American ghettos and had learned b-boying when the form was still a localized popular street dance. He said this in response to my questions about the significance of the videos and this emphasized for me the embodied transmission of dance knowledge at this time.

Sometimes dancers were exposed first through their local scene and then through travels to other countries. For example, in an interview I did with a Toronto b-girl, she recalled learning first from dancers in Toronto, then practicing with dancers on a personal visit to Chicago, and then later learning from pioneering dancers on a b-boy/b-girl 'pilgrimage' trip to New York City. In an example from a video, a crew from France told dancers from New York City that they were first inspired by a legendary European crew called Actual Force and then later were influenced by early 1980s American films such as *Beat Street* and *Wild Style* (*Break Away Video Magazine Vol. 2*).

Many dancers brought video cameras with them on their tours and travels as evidenced in the underground videos of this time and interviews I carried out with touring dancers. They recorded the interviews they conducted, as well as the styles performed by other dancers. They felt privileged by the opportunity to travel around parts of the world and to be exposed to many different dance styles. These opportunities led them to share this experience with other dancers

that were not able to travel. They shared their travel experiences through videos. For example, in the opening to the first video tape of the *7 Gems*, the dancers express their emphasis on sharing knowledge:

Mr Wiggles: On tour [we] have the opportunity to meet a lot of b-boys [and] people that are down or affiliated in some way with hip hop...[we made this video] so y'all can see them.

Ken Swift: Everyone wants massive footage on breaking but it's [also] all about taking in knowledge (*Seven Gems Video Magazine Vol. 1*).

The dancers represented on this videotape were from all different areas of the world. In interviews that I conducted, there is evidence that the videos circulated far beyond the reach of the dancers' tours (to be discussed further in section 3). The touring dancers wanted to use the video medium to showcase dancers (and footage of dancing) from all around the world. They wanted to build knowledge about the experiences of dancers and their local histories (*Seven Gems Vol. 1*).

I argue that there is an element of journalism in these videos. The videomakers situate the dancing in these mediated visual texts through language and create meaning by giving the images a verbal context. They also report about dance styles from different parts of the world, evaluating aesthetic tastes and making value judgments through their commentary on the videos. As Louw (2001) points out "journalists [here I am considering the dancers to be journalists in the context of their underground videos] arriving in a new context are foreigners, not rooted in the history or codes of the society they are expected to report on" (193). Likewise, the dancing 'journalists,' would learn about the local history in a short period of time through interviews with the dancers they met from that particular region. The next section considers the relationship of traveling dancers to the new locales that they visited in further detail.

‘Non-Places’ and the transformation of space into a site of dance communications

This section’s emphasis is on the traveling, touring dancers’ relationships to dancers that they met from various countries. I draw on the work of Marc Augé (1995) about ‘non-places’ in travel and compare this to the experiences of space that the dancers report having experienced. Place is a social space where elements of spatial relationships are combined with social expectations (Creswell 1996). Moreover, according to Creswell, place often helps us to differentiate between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ providing a form of classification. For Augé the “traveller’s space” is the “archetype of a non-place” (1995: 86).

A ‘non-place’ is a space designed for the movement of bodies through an area. For Augé, spaces like airports, hotels and motorways, each provide the traveler with an experience of movement through uninhabited space. He argues that these spaces seem to be becoming more frequent all around the world:

The intelligence of space is...complicated by the spatial overabundance of the present. This, as we have seen, is expressed in changes of scale, in the proliferation of imagined and imaginary references, and in the spectacular acceleration of means of transport. Its concrete outcome involves considerable physical modifications: urban concentrations, movements of population and the multiplication of what we call ‘non-places...’ (34).

The term non-place encompasses two “distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces” (94). Also, the relationship between people in space is affected by their shared experience of non-places. For Augé, there is solitude for individuals in their shared use of non-places. I argue that the dancers’ use of non-places in travel is less about solitude and more about making

connections with one another. Thus, my work will borrow only a general framework from Augé's use of the term 'non-places' as this can be applied to street dance travels.

The dancers turned 'non-places' into potential sites of affinities through their dance movements and communications in various spaces including subways. Subways have often been affiliated with New York City b-boy/b-girl culture. Some of the interviews I did with dancers in New York City were conducted in subways⁴. Also, subways are one of the most commonly referred to sites in newspaper articles about the meeting of dancers to battle, cypher or practice. Subways are designed for the movement of people through space and dancers appropriate these spaces (non-places) to dance.

Dancers had the experience of traveling to new locations and finding other people that shared their love of a particular dance practice. Often the dancers they met spoke different languages. Dance became their primary way to communicate and share a kinesthetic experience with each other through similar forms of expression. For example, in a local Toronto paper, a dancer from Canada emphasizes the significance of communicating through dance in new places. After traveling to many different countries, he states that "rap isn't the universal language, b-boying is!" (Mariano 2002). In video footage, a dancer from New York City exclaims in the non-diegetic⁵ voice-over narration that b-boys from France are "getting down [dancing] in my hotel lobby [in France]" (*Break Away Video Magazine Vol. 1*).

In my participant observation and experiences as a b-girl, I've observed that street dancers use the space available in non-places (designed for movement through areas) to share affinities and communications through dance. With the escalating amounts of spaces designed for movement through spaces, there is arguably an increase in non-places that can be appropriated for street dances. The experience of travel has brought a sense of affinity to some

of these traveling dancers as they share their love of dance with others and non-places (or the traveler's experience of non-places) are transformed into sites of communication. In travel this transformation of space takes on new meanings for dancers who communicate through dance in ways that move beyond similar languages, cultures and places of residence. Spaces that are designed for the movement of bodies from one point to another can also be used to share experience as dancers move within the spaces and with one another. The traveling dancers experience communication with other b-boys and b-girls in new cities through their use of non-places. I argue that dance communications provide the *familiarity* necessary to network beyond language barriers, new spaces and regional differences.

This section explored some of the touring practices of dancers in the early 1990s. They built networks through their dance communications, conversations and interviews with other dancers from around the world. The dancers used this opportunity to connect with people from other parts of the world that were practicing assorted types of dance or doing local appropriations of b-boying/b-girling. When they met up with new dancers they sought out versions of the local histories from dancers. Lastly, the dancers videotaped their experiences and these videos began to circulate within transnational networks of dancers (to be discussed further in section 3). The next section will explore other types of travel that demonstrate new appropriations and negotiations between dancers from various countries.

Section Two: Competitions and 'pilgrimages'

Before the dance style had even become popular in the media (during the late 1970s and early 1980s) dancers in New York traveled to other parts of the city upon hearing that there were

notoriously talented dancers there (*Freshest Kids 2002*). From the very beginning, the dance style had a competitive quality that encouraged dancers to travel in an effort to seek out other dancers to battle with. The objective of citywide journeys by dancers was to find new b-boys to test their skills against.

This aspect of travel in b-boy/b-girl culture continued into the 1990s. For example, in a local television interview from 1992, Mr. Wiggles suggested that:

[B-boying is a] street gang version of turf [except] instead of turf it's your move, style...competing in styles.

During the period of unpopularity, the search for new dancers to battle had extended beyond a local city journey to a full-scale worldwide search for new dancers.

Rivera (2003) identifies two annual events in New York City where dancers gather together to practice their skills: the Zulu Nation anniversaries and the Rocksteady Crew anniversaries. Through my experiences as a dancer (who has attended an anniversary event) and through my interviews, I know that dancers from all over the world also make the journey each year to New York City for these b-boy/b-girl events.

This journey is called a 'pilgrimage' by the dancers that have traveled to New York (or the United States in general) because of the nature of the experience that they have there. For example, b-girl Asia One encourages dancers to "make those pilgrimages to understand that knowledge [the history of b-boying/b-girling]"⁶ (*Break Away Video Magazine Vol. 2*). Dancers suggested in interviews that the reason they traveled was to see the original styles from New York City and also to learn the early history of the dance. One dancer recalled meeting pioneers and he placed emphasis on these encounters because he had an opportunity to learn about the history of the dance. Another dancer from Toronto suggests in an interview with another b-boy

online that: “my trip to *B-Boy Summit* was the best experience I’ve had in my entire life...I was able to be around all the famous b-boys who are like celebrities to me” (Dyze 2006). Dancers also travel to connect and compete with other dancers and share their love of street dance forms⁷.

The pilgrimages to events became a way for dancers to see new influences and developments in the dance, as well as connect and network with other dancers. Also, importantly, this gave dancers the opportunity to compete with dancers of the highest caliber, innovations and skill levels. For example, when Toronto b-boys and b-girls I interviewed went to New York City for events they learned from and competed against dancers from this area. Dancers that they met up with from other countries also learned some of the aesthetic tastes and value judgments that the New York dancers cultivated locally.

Global appropriations and questions of influence in b-boy/b-girl culture

In recent years, accounts of global hip hop have drawn attention to the localized content and linguistic inflections by rappers around the globe (Mitchell 1996). Bennett (2000) wants to “reconsider the term local, the relationship between locality and identity and the role of popular music as a resource in the construction of local identities.” (63). He argues that if we perceive the “ ‘local’ not as a definite space but rather as a series of discourses, which involve ways of picturing the local and one’s relation to it, it becomes possible to see the local as a contested space, as a place that is both real, and to use Chaney’s terminology ‘fictionalised’ ” (63).

How do we measure the various constructions of and discourses about local appropriations or innovations of b-boying/b-girling without an aesthetic understanding of street dance styles? This is more difficult to measure than the use of regional dialects in speech and

music as an explicit form of (constructed) localized expressions. However, dancers also create local dialects through their innovations with movement. These styles develop over time through lineages of influences and innovations in dance scenes. This was especially true in the early 1990s, when dancers could be distinguished regionally through their recognizable dance style dialects. Even more crucial to this particular study is the way that these innovative regional dialects of b-boy/b-girl movements began to influence and inspire dancers in flows between countries in an ongoing exchange.

During my interviews with b-boys and b-girls from New York City and Los Angeles, they stated that in the early 1990s, European dancers arrived in New York City and made an impact on the networks of dancers in North America. They cultivated innovative styles in their interpretations of the dance that both inspired and influenced the dance culture. The European dancers, especially a dancer named Storm from Germany, were acknowledged by North American dancers for taking power moves to a whole different level of difficulty and prowess⁸.

Dancers from Canada were also recognized for their original footwork and intricate tricks. Members of Bag of Trix (crew) from Toronto also became the only crew to perform onstage with the Rocksteady Crew at one their anniversaries⁹. In the early 1990s Gizmo and other members of Bag of Trix went to New York City for a Zulu Nation anniversary event. In an interview I did with a New York b-girl she recalled that the Rocksteady crew and Bag of Trix connected and formed networks during this time in the early 1990s. Gizmo became known through his presence at this event because of his original dance style which featured a focus on footwork and innovative dance styles.

In the underground videos, it is clear that many other dancers from a variety of countries similarly brought new innovations and stylistic appropriations to the battles. They influenced

dancers from the United States or at least won their respect and credibility. Dancers also began to express preferences for various streams of dance dialects that were being produced. For example, a dancer from Los Angeles says that although he saw the Toronto dancers on an early video of the 1990s, he was more influenced by the styles coming out of Europe during this time period. His style developed into an original, momentum based and power-oriented style that further developed on the innovations of the European dancers.

Another dancer from California that I have conversed with in my past experiences as a dancer suggested that crews in his area were influenced by the Toronto styles and developed these ideas in new directions. These dancers appreciated the innovative footwork, countless tricks and freestyle-like veracity of the Toronto dancers. It is also important to note that many dancers from the West Coast saw dancers from areas of Europe, Canada and other countries through the circulation of video footage throughout North America (this will be discussed further in section 3). For example, in an interview I did with a well-known West Coast b-boy, he expressed that he first saw Toronto dancers on a “copy of a copy of a copy” of a video that was in the possession of one of his friends. Another dancer that I interviewed from the West Coast said that he first remembered hearing about Toronto dancers from another crew in the area that was influenced by a videotape they had seen with Toronto dancers.

The question of mimetics, influence and innovation in b-boy/b-girl culture requires further analysis (and is beyond the scope of this study). However, one New York City b-boy who has danced since the 1980s suggested that dancers are influenced by other dancers, teachers, etc. He told me that most b-boys/b-girls will dance in a style similar to other dancers for about two years and then they start to develop their own style, character and flavor. The concept of influence in b-boy/b-girl dance styles is part of the progress of a dancer. The developments of (constructed)

localized styles in different parts of the world often reflect this process of development (I'll return to this).

Part of the aesthetic tastes of the dance in the United States involves the demand for each dancer to develop original and personal flavors and character in their performance. Herein lies one of the complicated formulas of hip hop culture that has been unattended to in analysis: where local cultures in various countries mimic or produce homogenous hip hop dance styles they are often not linked in to the transnational networks or an understanding of the American aesthetics of the dance that value history, originality and local flavors. Where other countries produce original flavors and address local contexts: they are either replicating or at least resembling the *aesthetic tastes* and *value judgments* of American dancers.

According to the underground videos and the interviews corroborating the spectatorship of said videos, competitions did not just take place in New York City. Many events began to take place on a larger scale in various countries and other parts of the United States in the 1990s. Events also took place on small scales in local scenes such as Toronto, Ontario. According to a New York dancer I interviewed, traveling dancers would be invited to judge, compete or cypher with dancers at these events.

According to the *B-Boy Summit* underground video documents (and website for the event), by the mid-1990s, the annual *B-boy Summit* in Los Angeles had become one of the most widely attended gatherings of dancers in the world. Like the New York City events, dancers came from all over the world came to see the most talented dancers all in one location (*B-Boy Summit* 3). They would cypher with other dancers from various countries, hear the pioneers of the dance form speak on panels and make connections with other dancers. They did this through cyphers, battles, and parties.

The *B-boy Summit* emphasized all the elements of hip hop culture, involving graffiti showcases, emcee battles and DJ performances. One of the event coordinators, Asia One, expressed this inclusion in her introductory address on a *B-boy Summit* videotape. She explicitly articulates the event's emphasis on all of the elements of hip hop. This involvement of the other mediums extended the networks beyond dancers and strengthened the values of community and growth within the b-boy/b-girl networks and larger hip hop scenes.

The emphasis of the event coordinators was on building a sense of community, as well as sharing knowledge about the history of the dance. The event organizers used the medium of video to create dialogues about the desired directions the movement should take:

Asia One: The B-boy Summit...[was created] for the dancers within hip hop culture, the b-boys and b-girls to get together under one roof and to express their ideas about hip hop dance, how it started and to talk about where it's going to the next level. We define terminology within the dance world and we display our skills of the dance... (*B-Boy Summit 3*)

These events became increasingly attended by dancers and artists from around the world and emphasized the global dialogues between dancers:

Asia One: We always have the mad circles going on where you see different b-boys and b-girls from all over the world, all different parts, come together and just get loose (*B-Boy Summit 3*).

According to the Toronto dancers I interviewed and my experiences as a b-girl when the dancers met up at these events they would be overwhelmed by the volume of other dancers in attendance and the diversity of places the dancers had traveled from. For local dancers (in New York for example) events often served as a source of inspiration as they observed the various directions that dancers worldwide had taken the dance form. This also gave dancers an opportunity to share some of the aspects of their local dance histories that they valued with each other.

In this section I have discussed the existence of major b-boy/b-girl events that began in the 1990s and provided an avenue for dancers to network transnationally. This involved dancers who traveled to new locations, making a ‘pilgrimage’ as they often described the experience, to converse with dancers from all over the world. The dancers did this to seek out new inspirations, battle new dancers, learn aspects of the collective histories of the dance form and to share their love of the dance with fellow participants and supporters.

Section 3: Videos and their circulation

In my experience as a dancer, I have observed that video event footage has circulated the longest through personal home video collections. Dancers make copies of other people’s footage of dance competitions and bring this footage to events, practices and fellow dancers’ houses to share with their friends and crew members. When the home video footage from events was recorded in the 1990s from one VCR to another, the video footage would lose generations of quality with each new copy. With the advent of digital video tapes and digital cameras, visual footage does not lose quality in the same way as the older analog video format. The videos began to circulate extensively as dancers traveled to new places bringing their footage with them and sharing this documentation with other b-boys/b-girls.

Video technologies, circulation and distribution

Technology is not an evenly distributed resource (Lull 2001). Although many dancers did not have the means to access the resources of video equipment during the early 1990s, there were some dancers that acquired cameras and began to produce videotapes (*Seven Gems Vol. 1*).

The initial attempts at producing videos during this time period involved low budget production qualities like using two VCRs to *edit* the footage together. Mr. Wiggles and Ken Swift called their videos “underground travel video magazines” (see *Seven Gems Vol. 1*). Later on, members of Stylelements crew would call their videos “underground documentaries” (see *Stylelements* videos).

After the videos were produced, well-known dancers who toured, performed, judged or competed in shows would bring videos with them in their backpacks to events to sell to other dancers. Lull (1995) writes that culture is continuously reconstituted through “reterritorialization”¹⁰ involving the “creative uses of personal communications technology and the mass media”. Globalization then is a complex flow of interacting diverse cultural positions and practices that modify social, political and cultural power. Through transculturation, indigenization and hybridization, people and cultures go through a process of deterritorialization and then reterritorialization. Through deterritorialization, cultural signs are released from fixed locations in time and space. Deterritorialization is the result of cultural disjuncture that tugs at the seams of cultural structures, relationships, settings and representations. Reterritorialization then involves a renegotiation of terms built up through human agency and use of technologies. This reading of globalization, technologies and communications involves a constant negotiation and rebuilding of local cultures in a larger web of affiliations.

In the transnational networks of b-boy/b-girl culture, I suggest that the video technology provided a significant outlet for communications between dancers that assisted in the *deterritorialization* in the dance. Also, the shift in dance styles and influence of European dancers (among others) on the American styles of dance exemplifies the role of video technologies in the *reterritorialization* of global hip hop culture. The next section will

investigate various models of communication to better understand the significance of the distribution and circulation of b-boy/b-girl videos.

Trade routes of communication: what the route tells us about the senders

Carey (1992) identifies two ways that communication is theorized: a transmission view and a ritual view. The ritual view of communication is a model that emphasizes communities, fellowship, participation and sharing. For Carey this view is “directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time, not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (18). On the other hand, the transmission view of communication is formed from an analogy with geography and transportation. In this model communication is seen as a way of “giving information to others” (15).

The transmission view of communication accounts for most of the writing about b-boying/b-girling so far. The media produces representations, these representations are transported across various countries and the public receives those images. In accounts of global b-boy/b-girl culture, the mainstream movies that highlighted breaking are described as forms that disseminated the dance to different areas of the globe where they influenced the spread of hip hop culture in the early 1980s.

In the case of both the b-boy/b-girl home video footage and the video tapes produced by dancers in the 1990s, the ritual view of communication seems to offer the closest comparison. The videotapes represented the shared beliefs of the dancers that were showcased in the videos. However, what if we see Carey’s work not as views, but rather as dominant traits in different communication mediums? For example, the movies and early images transmitted around the

globe were received and then appropriated. The circulation of underground video artefacts during the 1990s presents a representation of shared beliefs and experiences similar to Carey's view of 'ritual' communications. By the late 1990s, I would argue that the videos shift again to a dominant transmission approach, as dancers give direct addresses in videos towards newer dancers.

Both components Carey suggests have fissures, a feature which is clear when his ideas are applied to b-boying/b-girling. For example, although the videotapes that circulated during the 1990s represented shared beliefs and fellowships, they were also transmitted through different places. How do we account for communications similar to Carey's ritual view (emphasizing community, participation and sharing), yet analogous to geography and transportation (and thus the transmission view) in their transnational distribution routes?

Boutros and Straw (forthcoming) outline a new model of communication. They suggest a view of communication that explores models of "circulation". In one instance for them:

The most sustained recent engagement with "circulation" has come, unsurprisingly, in the study of media forms. Media institutions, such as newspapers, have long used the term "circulation" to describe both the manner and extent of their public reach. "Distribution" is used more commonly within the audio-visual industries, to describe the dissemination of films or musical recordings, but "circulation" goes beyond the practical activity of delivery to capture the cultural resonances of media artefacts and their movement.

Their use of circulation encapsulates the movement of artefacts through different places (the transportation of artefacts is similar to Carey's transmission view) while still capturing the fragments of cultural resonances (this expands Carey's ritual view).

This idea of circulation is useful when considering the movement of b-boy/b-girl videos through various places while still emphasizing the representation and cultivation of shared beliefs within the content and distribution of the videos. Furthermore, circulation can be

extended beyond the video artefacts moving through various places (in the backpacks of traveling dancers) to explain the circulation of embodied dance movements shared by traveling dancers as they communicate with each other through shared space. The next chapter applies the use of circulation as a model to discuss the impact and movement of the video artefacts.

Conclusion

The transnational communication networks between dancers developed over the course of the 1990s. There was also an increase in the amount of dancers during this decade. These factors led to a growing popularity and public interest towards the dance form that began in the late 1990s¹¹. This chapter has introduced the three major communication channels that dancers used to network with each other in the early 1990s. I argue that the major transnational networks were developed through world tours, competitions and videos.

This chapter also demonstrated some preliminary investigation into the relationship between traveling dancers and video artefacts in a popular dance form with transnational appeal. For example, the touring dancers soon began to make videos, as did event coordinators. Videos began to circulate and extend beyond the travels of touring dancers, as dancers made copies of videos to share with their friends back home.

The communication channels that were forming through traveling dancers and circulating video artefacts arguably enabled dancers across various nations to build a sense of familiarity, community, networks and affinities. The dancers' use of videos, touring and traveling also helped to contribute to transnational building of knowledge about b-boy/b-girl history through out its unpopular relationship to popular culture. The involvement of dancers from various

countries inspired new innovations in the dance, as well as developing new methods to circulate ideas with each other beyond language barriers.

Chapter 5

Underground videos and the circulation of imagined *affinities* in transnational b-boy/b-girl networks

The movements of b-boys and b-girls across various nations generated new opportunities for dialogues through language and also through dance. I proposed that during these travels and tours dancers often felt connected to each other through their sharing of space and practice. In this chapter, I provide more evidence of these affinities expressed in the underground b-boy/b-girl video texts. The transnational networks that dancers built during the unpopular period of North American b-boy/b-girl history speak to an underground movement that mobilized beneath the radar of mainstream popular cultural tastemakers for many years. Again, in this chapter, I will provide examples from the videos of how dancers felt about their ‘underground’ movement including the aesthetic choices of their videos, the content and the significance. This chapter analyzes how underground videos enhanced communications between dancers and generated meanings for North American dancers during the unpopular period of b-boy/b-girl history. Moreover, I introduce the term ‘imagined affinities’ to describe the affiliations and connections of dancers’ transnationally through their shared passion for dance lifestyles, a sharing of histories and embodied musical practices.

Imagined communities and underground video magazines

For Anderson (1983) ‘imagined communities’ is a concept that explains how people within particular nations imagine their affiliations with one another. Anderson argues that the

development of printing presses increased the production and distribution of novels and newspapers. These factors contributed to the development of the nation state. Anderson writes:

...[the population] gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community. (44)

Cultural artefacts can produce a sense of belonging across geographical regions and this can be compared to an analysis of the meaning generated by the circulation of underground b-boy/b-girl video magazines for dancers.

Anderson's (1983) concept of 'imagined communities' describes how people who live across a geographical space feel nationally connected through textually-based media. The emergence of the printing press, national newspapers and nationalistic novels developed strong notions membership in nation-states. Anderson suggests that novels and newspapers address the reader as part of a nation and this contributed to the reader's sense of belonging to an (imagined) community.

Anderson's idea about imagined communities is applied to an analysis of the hip hop 'nation' in the writing of Forman (2004). Forman suggests that the academic and journalistic writing on hip hop contribute to the development of the hip hop "nation". For him, the hip hop canon includes collections of literature on hip hop culture. He suggests that this textually based writing about the elements (emceeing, breakdancing, graffiti, DJing) provides the circulation of information for the ongoing experience of the unified hip hop nation¹.

However, during the time period of b-boying/b-girling addressed in this study, there was a lack of textually based cultural articles about the dance. Even though there was an absence of literature, the movement continued to grow and develop transnationally. In b-boy/b-girl culture,

knowledge circulates through the mediated and embodied elements such as video artefacts and traveling dancers.

Anderson's idea of imagined communities and Forman's use of this concept in relation to hip hop culture provide the foundation for my exploratory research into the meaning of cultural artefacts in b-boy/b-girl culture. According to Anderson, imagined communities are built through cultural texts. What is the difference between this model and the ongoing identifications between dancers enabled through underground video magazines (or documentaries)? Anderson's description of a 'visible invisibility' suggests that readers imagine each other but don't necessarily see direct images of each other in the text. The increase in mediated *visibility* of dancers, through the underground b-boy/b-girl video artefacts, suggests that during the period of b-boy/b-girl's unpopularity, these visual cues could lead dancers to believe that the dance was gaining popularity as an underground movement.

An illuminating example of this visual cue occurs in the very first *Seven Gemz Video Magazine*. I will include in detail the talking head addresses of two of the video makers/b-boys here:

Ken Swift: Check this out man. I just want to drop this real quick on y'all. Seven Grand Masters. Underground affiliation: Rocksteady Crew. Enough said. Underground. Underground movement. Here in Israel being dope. Being nasty at what you do. What we wanna do with the b-boy video magazine is share with y'all our travels through b-boying. Know what I'm saying? God blessed us with the opportunity to go around the world and bounce around. *With the dance not a lot of people get that opportunity to do what we're doing right now.*

Mr. Wiggles: This video is dedicated to all the b-boys that never had the opportunity to go around the world and travel because they passed away doing their ghetto violence and so forth and *this is also a chance for us to show y'all b-boys from every aspect and from every part of the globe.* Know what I'm saying? ***So all y'all can see how large our culture truly is...*** So me and Kenny got together one day and decided to put out a magazine, then we said, you know what? Forget a magazine; *let's put out a*

video magazine you know what I'm saying because b-boying is visual...you need to see it on video kid (Seven Gemz Video Magazine Vol. 1).

In this section, Mr. Wiggles has expressed the intention of the video makers to show dancers *visually* how many b-boys and b-girls around the world practice the dance form. As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter 1, perceptions about the popularity of a form is often based on its visual presence in mediated landscapes and the accessibility that various groups have to those movements, sounds or images.

As Ken Swift suggests in the above passage, he is affiliated with an underground movement. The videos emerge out of that underground movement. Will Straw (2005) suggests that “cultural citizenship is less about residing within culture than about the necessity of moving within it, and the negotiations and transformations which that movement entails” (183). Both Ken Swift and Mr. Wiggles identify as affiliates of an underground movement and their video documents circulate within those (dance) movements that take them across various geographical locales.

Imagined affinities in underground movements

I introduce the term ‘imagined *affinities*’ to describe the connections that dancers feel with each other beyond nations because of their shared dance practices (and identification as part of a larger hip hop nation in many cases). Through mediated video texts circulating across geographical regions these connections are spread even further. As expressed in the quote from Ken Swift above, the dancers originally intended to use the visual medium of video to share their experiences on tours with dancers that did not have the opportunity to travel. In my experiences

as a dancer, I've observed that the videos also began to circulate outwards to dancers that were often in privileged economic positions to travel. In the 1990s, there was an increase in the number of dancers traveling to events². Thus, imagined *affinities* of a transnational scale are enhanced through *circulating* video artefacts. I will address in the next section how the production, distribution and reception of videos (culminating in Boutros and Straw's (forthcoming) model for "circulation") create a sense of transnational identification through shared dance representation, shared histories and shared knowledge (at least for the North American dancers surveyed in this study).

I am not suggesting that the dancers ignore their socioeconomic and cultural differences through their affiliations and affinities (although this is not out of the realm of possibilities), but rather this describes the desire of cultural producers to find an ethical treatment in their representations of other people. This includes representations of shared space on videos by dancers from various locales. The videos also present interviews where dancers begin to develop preliminary understandings of various b-boy/b-girl local street dance histories³. The circulation of ideas was taking place across geographical regions, and the videos enhanced the speed and distance of these communications. Therefore, imagined affinities enabled an increase in the connections between people that circulated through mediated texts.

These video documents and travels enabled dancers from various locales to feel that their imagined affinity with other scenes was indeed justified. Anderson (1983) writes of imagined communities:

[E]ach communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion" (35).

Dancers from various nations are separated and distanced from each other geographically during their everyday lives although the speed of mediated relationships continues to accelerate. They have different kinds of local and social pressures and thus, on one level, their affinities with each other are imagined (initially taking place mostly through mediated sources). However, their love of the dance and dance culture, understanding of the movement's significance, and understanding of the histories of the dance provide a concrete basis for their affinities. Thus, the affinities built through transnational networks led to the production of imagined affinities that grew out of the circulating video artefacts in an increasing population of dancers in the 1990s.

If aspects of the transnational scene are imagined with this popular dance, the imagined affinities stem from the circulating notions of common practices of b-boys and b-girls across countries. Although I have demonstrated in Chapter 4 that networks were formed through traveling and touring dancers, the imagined affinities are also enhanced by the trajectories of video artefacts. Thus, the embodied affinities made by forming networks led to further imagined affinities through circulating video artefacts.

The focus of this study involves the trajectory and movement of traveling dancers and circulating artefacts between various spaces. However, my research on b-boying/b-girling is aligned with my perception of hip hop as a trans-local culture in its ideal form. In other words, I am exploring what mechanisms are in place (the videos and travels) to produce feelings of kindredship (translocalism) in a transnational network.

I suggest that the primary shared affinity between dancers across geographical locations and culture is created through embodied dance practices (this can be extended to the practices of participants in the other elements of hip hop culture). Also, the transnational networks continued to form through the embodied practices of b-boys and b-girls during this time period. Dancers

from various places came to know each other personally. This describes the type of communications that dancers sought during their travels and includes both the tours and pilgrimages of dancers that were discussed in Chapter 4.

Circulating artefacts: Video production, distribution and reception

In the 1990s, I argue that through the underground b-boy/b-girl video productions, dancers were able to take direct control over the messages about the dance communicated internationally⁴. Unlike the first explosion of media attention towards the dance in the 1980s, when dancers had little control over how they were represented in popular media, the dancers could now create their own representations through accessible and affordable developments in video technologies. These representations became a more effective means of providing transnational communications between dancers.

Laing (1997) identifies the role of affordable music technologies in harboring local expressions. He argues that it is through this resourcefulness that hybrid forms are produced. Video technologies enabled imagined affinities between dancers. Videos also contributed to a perceived popularity of the dance, through the collection of dancers from around the world represented in audio and visual components. The videos also inspired North American dancers by showing them the mutations and hybrid dance styles developed in other countries, as well as the mediated images of transnational networks developing at this time (as discussed in Chapter 4).

During the production of the videos, the dancers conducted interviews with various dancers of other nations. They were seeking common ground between themselves and other

dancers who often spoke different primary languages and danced different localized styles. The early underground b-boy/b-girl videos represented dancers from around the world respectfully. There was a mutual respect and exchange between the dancers conducting the interviews and the dancers being interviewed⁵ (see *Seven Gems Vol. 1*). The videos are also intended for a b-boy/b-girl audience familiar with the dance. This is evident in the videos when dancers give their direct addresses to the camera (as suggested earlier). Many of the interviews involved a talented local dancer of an area being interviewed, a legendary dancer (such as Ken Swift or Mr. Wiggles) asking questions and a third local b-boy acting as a translator so that the dancers could communicate through words (as well as dance) (see *Seven Gems Volumes*).

In the videos, touring dancers often met up with b-boys and b-girls and also connected with other types of performers. For example, the Ghetto Original Dance Company (mentioned in the previous chapter) traveled to Brazil and they connected with Capoeira performers. Capoeira is a Brazilian martial art that shares many stylistic elements with b-boying/b-girling. When the b-boys and sole b-girl⁶ met up with this Capoeira Company, they asked questions about the meaning behind their moves and the history of their martial art form. They looked for analogous comparisons between the aesthetics and meaning behind the two forms. Part of the reason for their interest was that b-boying/b-girling had begun to pick up new flavors in the early 1990s heavily influenced by Capoeira (*Seven Gems Video Magazine Vol. 1*). What is also emphasized in the exchanges between the performers in the videos is the North American b-boys' desires to find out the political meaning symbolized in the Capoeira dances. Also, the dancers considered both performances to be part of a universal dance language and form of communication and training.

The b-boy video makers were especially concerned with political significance and socioeconomic concerns and struggles of the dancers that they met. They also drew attention to the low budget quality and aesthetic in their video productions. They warned the spectator in their videos not to expect any fancy editing or commercialized product (meaning footage that is well shot with proper lighting and editing, etc.). For example:

Mr. Wiggles:

This is [a] dirt underground video y'all so don't expect no crazy ass editing and all that man. This is straight up dirt underground man. We are trying to come real man, try[ing] not to make this video commercial and what not... [and we are including] mad raw footage (*Seven Gems Vol. 1*).

The producers of the dance videos expressed their personal tastes through inclusions or exclusions in the editing process. In the late 1990s, a new type of video style was beginning to emerge largely due to the increasing status, reputation and originality of a crew based out of California known as the Stylelements crew. In a video called: *Ka Ka Poo Poo Porcupine*, Remind (a member of Stylelements) describes in a direct address to the camera that their crew is “a new legion of b-boys” and suggests “it’s up to us to take it to the new millennium” in hip hop culture that is “culture – know what I’m saying?” Remind situates the ‘new school’ dance styles that they were developing in a historical lineage of respect for the generations of dancers that have come before:

Remind: When we started – yes – it became a trend but it’s making so many people lack [and be unable to hold it down in a long cypher...] because they don’t have the foundation. They don’t even know why we dance that way yet [by ‘that way’ he means the new styles they have developed and coded as original and ‘new school’]. They don’t even know how we developed that style. See we developed it through foundation bro. There’s only one foundation...but what we developed now doesn’t become foundation. (Stylelements video: *Ka Ka Poo Poo Porcupine*)

Remind is addressing a spectator that may not have knowledge about the history of the dance form. On the one hand, their direct addresses imply that the spectator may not understand the history of the dance and on the other hand this video suggests that they situate themselves within a position of respect for the history of the dance.

What Remind is suggesting in this video is that his crew learned how to do the foundational moves of b-boying first. Then they developed new moves and ideas that evolved from their foundations. However, to advance their new styles, they originally learned the foundations. If they had not learned the foundations, he is arguing, they wouldn't be able to hold their own and have longevity and endurance in a circle. This video artefact, and Remind's address in the video, demonstrates how newer generations of dancers used their underground video productions to negotiate with the b-boy/b-girl historical context and situate themselves accordingly.

Socioeconomic concerns: B-boy/b-girl historiography and archives

Traveling dancers affiliated with this underground movement use video artefacts to circulate meanings about the global dance styles. I argue that videos help to produce shared histories through a visual form of archiving movements. Movements here refer to both the dancers' movements across places and the styles of dance movements that they produce. Each new dancer also negotiates with the context whereby he/she seeks to emerge through their video productions. Straw (2005) writes: "let us see the realm of culture, nevertheless, as one in which each gesture (each new film or act of artistic activism, for example) presumes an implicit negotiation with the context in which it seeks to emerge." The videos provide a shared (and

constantly renegotiated) history, an archive of dance moves and new visual knowledge about global dance practices.

This project is concerned with the distribution of videos across geographical locations during the unpopular period of the dance. I want to return to the quote that ended Chapter 4. Boutros and Straw write: “circulation goes beyond the practical activity of delivery to capture the cultural resonances of media artefacts and their movement.” Part of the cultural resonances of these videos involves the production of feelings of unity, mediated affinities and negotiated, ongoing historiography. These attributes are produced, I’d argue, through imagined affinities: the shared practices that bind cultural citizens.

As a concept, imagined affinities suggest that through videos, the dancers have shared histories and shared knowledge of each other. Any dancer can make a copy of a video, any dancer can become a tastemaker through their abilities as a dancer and any dancer can make copies of videos and pass them on. A dancer can contribute to the passing along of knowledge about the history of the dance through their experiences and participation.

The distribution channels are essential to the archiving and circulation of history. Without these infrastructures that enable distributions, histories are lost (and historiography shifts). According to Juhasz (2001), this is often the case in feminist historiographies of video art by women. There is a concern for the amnesia amongst newer artists without access to knowledge about the past. Both social and economic factors affect distribution channels and this further affects our knowledge of past works. (I will return to issues of gender and video technologies later on.) The dancers that contributed to the circulation of the video artefacts initially were everyday dancers, as well as legendary dancers. All of these dancers contributed to the collective distribution and circulation of the video dance archives. However, the significance

here is that the tapes circulated far. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 4, dancers often saw the videos that were reproduced as a “copy of a copy of a copy” (quote from interview with b-boy). Straw (2005) suggests that the trajectory of cultural movement holds meanings. I am suggesting that during the unpopular period of the dance, the videos cultivated imagined affinities across various places. I’ll return to this idea in Chapter 6.

Imagined affinities and circulation

This section addresses some of my observations as a practicing and traveling dancer. I noticed that when these videos continued to circulate in various regions this further developed the imagined affinities between dancers. As more dancers continue to travel vast distances and as more transnational networks form through popular demands for performances and battles, the transnational networks are often strengthened. Hip hop culture, often called the hip hop nation, is imagined by founders like Bambaataa to move beyond nation in identification and peaceful negotiation. B-boy/b-girl movements are after all the symbolic representation of the battle and when they are performed ideally there is no physical contact or actual aggression. Likewise, an extension of this concept is that the videos also become symbolic and represent the ideals of the cultural form.

Videos are watched in leisure moments and have significantly varied degrees of reception. Some dancers watch them faithfully; others just practice and learn from friends. Most dancers fall somewhere in between. The videos represent particles of discourse already present in the dancers’ lifestyles. Thus, the videos aren’t the primary modes of exchange between

dancers at the local level. However, the videos symbolically unite dancers across places through their shared space in the edited compilations represented.

Each new style negotiating with the context in which it seeks to emerge

Asia One is a legendary b-girl who pioneered the *B-Boy Summit* and *No Easy Props* crew. In an interview for a b-boy/b-girl fanzine, she summarizes some of the transnational innovations in the dance. Her account demonstrates a vast knowledge of a transnational history developing throughout the trajectory of b-boy/b-girl history. Asia One suggests that:

From the style of breaking on TV shows like 'That's Incredible', to my beginnings in b-girling in '94-'95 to today, breaking has witnessed many changes and contributions. From a style perspective, the aggressive, yet comical battle styles seen in the early 80s got a dose of 'European invasion' in the late 80s and early 90s by groups like Battle Squod who portrayed power, speed, and fluidity. West Coast flava during that same time period added power and gymnastic influences a la Airforce crew. By the mid 90s the West Coast held court with the addition of almost freestyle-like breaking (Remind style) the head bop, combined with lots of tricks, an era of 'must-have' moves like: hallow back, air chair, handstand everything...throw in the Miami style of raw toprock and uprock styles, and ill footwork flava perfected by the streetmaster with cut-throat battle tactics added later by Ground Zero crew. Now ya got b-girls shakin' things up with raw power and finesse and less influence on particular regions and styles with more soloist b-boys paving the way for the next generation. (Asia One 2003: 5)

What we can gather from this account is an emphasis on the transnational history that developed over the course of the 1990s. For example, she describes several major shifts. First, she describes the international influence that emerged in the time period of unpopularity in North America (late 1980s and early 1990s). Second, she distinguishes between two major styles both of the West Coast: the early 1990s power innovations of Airforce Crew and the later 1990s developments by crews like Stylelements Crew (she doesn't mention them explicitly but rather

refers to the styles of one of their crew members Remind). Third, she accounts for how the battle tactics and values shifted with Miami styles that were raw, aggressive and had more edge (cut-throat, performances of hyper aggression – like wrestling performers). She also indicates the increase in b-girls and their abilities during this period. Lastly, she describes the shift from distinguishable regional dialects and crews' styles to a focus on individual dancers' innovations. This demonstrates the global shifts in the transnational networks of the scene. We will take one example given here, the increase of b-girls, to explore the role of circulating video artefacts in the dance movements' cultural shifts.

The early case study by Kopytko (1986) described how predominantly male youth identified with the images of b-boys that they saw in movies from North America. Imagined affinities, both through the mediated texts and through travels, also gave women new access to the movement in the 1990s. During my interviews with three different b-girls, various accounts about the impact and influence of video artefacts were given. The first dancer from Toronto suggested that she was extremely influenced by her viewing of *Flashdance* as a child. She had identified with the lead character. Later, as a practicing b-girl, she recalls watching underground b-boy/b-girl videos with a keen eye to see b-girls dance. When she found a b-girl on the video, she would replay that section of the video. The imagined affinity she felt with other female dancers was also enhanced through her meeting of other women that she bonded with and practiced with in her local scene.

The second b-girl I interviewed suggested that early in her development she was influenced by the Fly Girls on the television show *In Living Color*. She liked their dance styles and felt that they were “keeping it real.” Later during on a trip to New York, she met a legendary b-girl, who she had seen on an underground b-boy/b-girl video. This b-girl gave her

advice on her footwork based on the lower center of gravity in women's bodies. Her embodied experiences of the dance and travel were emphasized in the interview.

A third b-girl I interviewed from New York City, who was one of the first women to really become recognized in the scene, also emphasized her live experiences with the culture all around her. (A New York legendary dancer I interviewed referred to this b-girl as "the original Bronx b-girl"). She explained that when she first wanted to learn the dance (coming from a gymnastics background) she studied a videotape of a routine that the b-boys had created. She learned all the moves on the video and then at the next practice showed the b-boys that she could also do the routine. The video gave her access to moves that she could practice in private. The b-boys were impressed that she could do the routine and started to train her after this. She was the first b-girl to produce an underground b-girl videotape representing all female dancers.

In the three examples from interviews introduced here, each of the b-girls used videos in a way that demonstrates the impact of videos and travel in their developments as dancers. Perhaps there is a correlation between the increase in video productions and the increase in b-girls in the scene cultivated through imagined affinities through both videos and travels. There is a possibility that videos gave women access into a male dominated art form through the visual representations of a few other b-girls at first, and an increasing amount of videos with b-girls throughout the 1990s. The archiving of history, and the circulation of archives, create knowledge and an ongoing negotiation of historical memories.

Popularity and dance populations

I suggest that the rise of popularity and interest in b-boy/b-girl culture adds to the imagined aspects of affinities. When the dance is popular then it is less likely for all the dancers in a city to know each other personally. The notion of popularity frequently indicates an increase in the street dance 'population'. This building of the 'nation' increases the impact of the videos to create feelings of imagined affinities between dancers.

There are also new shifts that have occurred in the communication of transnational scenes as a result of new media technologies. The introduction of the World Wide Web changed the nature of communications even further. The distribution channels of the WWW have enabled a higher rate of circulation. There is now a proliferation of b-boy images. One dancer suggested in our conversations that "everything" seems to be recorded these days. Underground b-boy/b-girl videos are also now available in stores that sell a variety of hip hop products.

In my experiences as a dancer, in the resurgence of the dance form's popularity, a similar rhetoric is espoused transnationally that speaks to the imagined affinities of dancers. Many b-boys and b-girls share a common language for talking about the dance. The values that they express are the same tastes and judgments that were spread during the unpopular period of the dance through the video artefacts and travels.

The videos also provide star-texts now. Star-texts include the "media interviews and imagery (including music video clips), onstage performance iconography and direct address to the audience, and critical commentary" about the star (Goodwin 1992: 101). Dancers that appear on videos become known. For dancers who become underground icons or legends in the transnational networks, their star-texts include the underground videos, their performances at

events, their street battles, interviews and everyday encounters with other dancers. The underground videos develop these star-texts and also help to establish the foundational syntax of dance moves that inspire or influence other dancers. This foundation builds a complex and intricate language of dance communicated globally.

Chapter 6

Conclusion: Longevity and (un)popularity in global b-boy/b-girl culture

In this project, I have introduced the term ‘imagined affinities.’ Imagined affinities are moments of identification with another cultural producer who shares an embodied practice (in this case b-boying/b-girling) through either mediated texts or travels through new places. The affinities can be formed through live, embodied communications whether in battles or dance performances or through the circulation of mediated images.

Dance moves are constantly circulating at an accelerated degree due to the World Wide Web and the increase in global b-boy/b-girl events. The reemerging popularity of the dance in the late 1990s has also allowed more opportunities for dancers to travel. As they do so, and as the population and popularity of the dance movement increase there is potential for both the negotiation of new meanings and the transformation of values attached to the dance. The production of b-boy/b-girl cultural artefacts captures fleeting moments of this underground movement. In the late 1990s the World Wide Web displaced the underground videos as the dominant mode of mediated communications. However, the World Wide Web also provided an outlet for an increase in the circulation of underground b-boy/b-girl videos.

The response of the North American dancers to the rejection of public tastes in the early 1990s demonstrates the resilience of b-boy and b-girl networks. Dancers used their resources (including occasional access to dance institutions or local television programming), travels and underground videos to produce meanings about the dance that circulated transnationally. They chose not to simply show massive footage of breaking in their video productions. They spread

their messages through various channels, consistently attaching and generating new meanings about the dance movement and its relationship to various waves in popularity. Their authority in the 1990s came from their abilities as dancers. To train your body is the primary conveyor of dedication to the underground movement. This is the primary basis that the dancers use to judge the legitimacy of the meanings that a dancer articulates.

I argue that to meet up with and dance with other dancers in a new space is to read their dedication to the dance through their movements. B-boys and b-girls can assess each other's abilities and movements (and thus their dedication, originality, dexterity, character, etc.), their valuing of history through knowledge of foundational moves, or even guess where they've been – who they might have danced with – what city they might be from. That dedication to the dance can be read within many rounds of a cypher. To know someone's dedication to the practice or what musical tracks they prefer is a way of knowing through bodily expressions. On one level shared dance practices are a form of imagined affinities, bonding through activities in a short-lived shared space (either on video or through travel). On another level, this raises interesting questions (beyond this study's parameters) about our understanding of the relationship between bodies in close proximity and popular music either through video texts or travels. A certain knowledge and trace of embodied history can be read on affective bodily levels, and conversations can further confirm where networks may connect or overlap.

When the dance started to become popular again, newer generations had easier access through media sources. However, older generations of dancers continue to teach newer generations. For example, one of the b-girls I interviewed from Toronto teaches classes to youth at risk. Another Toronto b-girl remembered learning from teachers in the late 1990s that insisted in their classroom on building and explaining knowledge of b-boy/b-girl aesthetics even if these

didn't fit the conventional teaching mode of a dance classroom (and the expectations of conventional dance students).

Also, when the dance form became popular again, dancers used the video medium to express their viewpoints to potential new spectators of videos. There was a shift in the direct address of b-boys and b-girls on the videos. A future area of investigation is an analysis into the shifts in direct addresses found in the videos during periods of both popularity and unpopularity. Who are the dancers addressing? Who is being interpellated by the text? What are they trying to suggest about the meanings of the dance?

The dancers' imagined affinities based on their embodied practices are always negotiated within new contexts of either popularity or unpopularity. However, there are some shared, consistent meanings generated throughout different waves of popularity. Knowledge built about the dance continues to include ongoing concerns for socioeconomic factors and relevance in their community projects including the production of community events like the *B-Boy Summit* and in Canadian hip hop events such as *Style in Progress* (Toronto) and *Under Pressure* (Montreal).

Various b-boys and b-girls are concerned with issues of longevity and renegotiate with waves of popularity to continually demonstrate relevance of their dance practices. Whether this is through their marginalized representations or small roles in mainstream movies (that youth identify with even in short sequences), the production of underground b-boy/b-girl videos, or performances and tours in connections with more established dance institutions, they continue to attach meaning to the dance. This meaning ultimately is the search for knowledge, longevity of traditions and resilience. Their resilience is gained through a cultural meaning inscribed on the body and formed through body practices. This continues to build momentums, movements and travels. The passing along of historical recollections indicates a constant struggle to move

differently. To move differently might actually teach both the body and the mind to act or at least imagine differently a negotiated place of longevity in popular culture in the most 'everyday' sense of the word.

One area for future study could examine how the mediated meanings of the dance are understood in comparison with the live, embodied meanings of the dance performances in interviews with by b-boys and b-girls. I hypothesize that the meanings that dancers draw from these different receptions of dance may suggest new ways to envision affect and the resistance towards meanings generated in relation to the media. In-depth studies of b-boying and b-girling can investigate how dancers have developed networks and circuits that are resilient to public tastes and are not in anyway broken by media attention or lack thereof.

I argue that the underground movements of this culture do not always position their practices in relation to the media or mainstream culture. Although they respond to varying waves of popularity, there are key resonances of the culture that continue to generate cultural and community meanings. Through this study, I suggest that the dancers demonstrate their resilience to the media acceptance or rejection during various time periods and sustained the dance through creative practices aimed at longevity including video productions and tours.

This project's emphasis was on exploring the unpopular period of the dance. I suggested that dancers communicated transnationally through tours, travels and underground videotexts. The new productions of videos by dancers were circulated within b-boy/b-girl networks. These circulations of values through video texts and travels enabled dancers to develop imagined affinities with dancers from far away places. The dance was missed by popular dance scholars who were generating their impressions of the dance from media sources that angled the dance as

a trend and spectacular subculture. However, the dance movement has shifted over time with the sharing of knowledge and experiences of dancers from one generation to the next.

On another level, popular dance scholars may have overlooked this period because the dancers lost their access to a visual presence publicly at both the local level and in mediated representations as pointed out by Kopytko (1986) in her study. However, the underground movements of this time period relied successfully on the word of mouth and travels of b-boys and b-girls. To be exposed to an underground video, one needed to have access to someone already linked into the networks on some level – and the videos that circulated often came to dancers through the hands of many other dancers.

Lastly, b-boy/b-girl culture did not disappear as cultural theorists have suggested. This is an element of hip hop culture that has demonstrated longevity and resilience despite the prolonged absence of mainstream representations in popular culture. This study has identified a lost time period of b-boy/b-girl history for future considerations of global hip hop culture.

NOTES

Chapter 1

¹ These terms, b-boying/b-girling and breaking, are used by the dancers to describe the dance form known to the general public through media accounts as 'breakdancing.'

² The Rocksteady Crew had worldwide fame in the early 1980s. Members were featured in movies and documentaries and they even released a hit music single. Some of the most well known b-boys in the world today danced in this crew including Crazy Legs, Mr. Wiggles, Ken Swift and Frosty Freeze.

³ The number of articles covering breakdancing in New York City had diminished significantly since 1984, with stories at the end of 1985 dealing with gang violence and injuries to children. This demonstrates not only a decline in coverage, but also the shift to negative media coverage of the dance.

⁴ One of the uninvestigated parts of my research for future consideration involves the relationship between popular dance forms like b-boying and b-girling with newer styles like krumping and clowning. The media representations of krumping and clowning in newspaper articles, televised news reports and documentaries seems to replicate the value judgments originally reported of b-boying in the early 1980s including the narrative of ghetto youth overcoming obstacles of oppression through dance.

Chapter 2

¹ The majority of the writing about breaking occurred during the early to mid-1980s. The outlets for this writing varied from newspaper articles to dance magazines to academic articles in performance studies journals. Most of the articles do not provide an in depth analysis of the movement, but rather express a celebratory reading of street dance and its emergence into high art dance institutions as a fresh new trend (Hager 1984, Holman 1984, Rosenwald 1984, Grubb 1984, Cox 1984, Pierpont 1984).

² I do not provide a review of the enormous amount of literature available about hip hop culture. These studies focus predominantly on hip hop music. The other 'elements' have taken secondary roles in the academic literature. However, as identified by Rivera (2003) and Chang (2005), each of the different elements has diverging trajectories at various points in the development of their unique components that need to be considered individually (although both of their accounts also focus predominantly on hip hop music). My project focuses exclusively on b-boying and b-girling and does not consider its relationship to graffiti, DJing and hip hop music. This is an area for further enquiry after the evidence of breaking's continued existence has been established.

³ McRobbie analyzes popular dance as a space for transgression and reaffirmation of traditional femininity. She argues that dance can be used as a forum for resistant or conventional expressions of gender roles and that these themes are related to music practices, film representations and scenes.

⁴ Although I address McRobbie's interventions for the study of popular dance, I don't situate the historical lineage of writing that she is resisting through her avoidance of addressing spectacular subcultures like breakdancing. There is enough literature already readily available on the developments of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and the range of critiques that

have been brought to studies of spectacular subcultures (for reviews of these developments see Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003, Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004).

⁵ Perhaps this absence in Thomas' work is a question of scope. B-boy/b-girl culture is regarded as a North American art form. This falls outside the parameters of Thomas' analysis of the sociology of dance in the UK.

⁶ This detail is based on my conversations with dancers from the Bronx before I began this project.

⁷ Popular dances such as salsa (for example, recent works by Pietrubruno 2002, Urquia 2005), are often related to issues surrounding socioeconomic origins and concerns about the construction of authenticity as a value. Authenticity as a value judgment with varying degrees of reception and use is also addressed in earlier works about popular music (see Keightley 2001).

⁸ I learned about the gang initiations (where dancers had physical contact) through conversations with dancers from Brooklyn. They suggested that the origins of particular flavors in the dance aesthetics came out of these gang rituals.

⁹ "Womanist" approaches consider the equality of women and move towards considerations of race and class. This was an intervention to a feminist approach that emphasized the perspective and agendas of white middle-class women.

¹⁰ Many of Banes' (1981, 1982, 1984, 1985) early articles were written for popular media presses of the era in New York City.

Chapter 3

¹ These categories for videos will be further explained in section 3 of chapter 4.

Chapter 4

¹ In the late 1990s, I attended an event at the Comfort Zone in Toronto that Crazy Legs also attended. Crazy Legs told dancers in Toronto that they need to call the dance 'b-boying' and 'b-girling' because the dance belongs to them and not to the media that named the form 'breakdancing.'

² In 1992, during an interview with Celial Protis for a television show called "The Propulsive Beat of the Urban Street," Steve "Mr. Wiggles" Clemente talks about his experience dancing with ballerinas. He discusses the emphasis on lines in ballet and how this is very different from the aesthetics of street dance forms.

³ Youtube is an internet site where anyone can add their own moving images.

⁴ One of the pioneering b-boys that I've had conversations with over the years and for this study recommended talking to 'everyday' dancers in New York City to get a sense of what the culture is about. I interviewed b-boys in subway stations when I was heading back to Manhattan from interviews and participant observation in the Bronx. The b-boys were busking every half hour for money in the subway.

⁵ 'Non-diegetic' is a film term used to designate a sound or title that is "coming from a source outside the space of the narrative" (Bordwell and Thompson 2001: 432). In this example, the American b-boy has added a voice-over narration in the post-production process of his videomaking.

⁶ This quote is from Mr. Wiggles Break Away video magazine vol. 2. Asia One and Easy Roc are interviewed by Mr. Wiggles.

⁷ In my interviews, many dancers expressed these reasons for travel.

⁸ Many dancers from North America now cite Storm as a major influence in their development as dancers (including dancers from Los Angeles and Toronto that I interviewed).

⁹ The achievement of performing on stage with the Rocksteady Crew at their anniversary is noted on Canadian crew: Bag of Trix website. www.bagoftrix.com

¹⁰ Reterritorialization and deterritorialization are terms originally used in the work of Deleuze and Guattari. However, Lull's use of the term is informed by works emerging out of anthropology and takes on different meanings.

¹¹ See introductory chapter for one newspaper account of this return of breakdancing.

Chapter 5

¹ Many of the b-boys and b-girls that organize events do identify as part of a larger hip hop culture including all of the other elements. For example, on the *B-Boy Summit Vol. 3* tape the dancers refer to themselves as part of the hip hop (Zulu) nation.

² Many dancers saw videos of travels during this time period and found out about various events this way. I know this from my experiences as a dancer and this speaks mainly to those dancers from my rural or remote areas that often have their first exposures to the dance through limited connections and networks. This speaks to the ways that the 'imagined *affinities*' are stronger the further from the centre of the movement a dancer is.

³ The content of the various videos capture an aesthetic that is fleeting as opposed to conventional documentaries that have fixed or conclusive arguments. What I am suggesting here is that the videos had an incomplete quality to them because of the low budget production value they possessed. Their production emphasis is on capturing fleeting performances rather than producing a representation of a closed performance text. Rather than developing a formed, cohesive, cinematic or artistic filmic experience exploring the medium of video, they wanted to focus more on the dance performance and the videos became a representation of fleeting performances rather than final performances by dancers in and of themselves.

⁴ The videos circulated across North America. For circulation they require compatible video systems. Videos circulated spread knowledge that often was further expanded through the travels of dancers.

⁵ On the interviews that made their way into the videos at least. I have no evidence or interviews that cover this component and so this argument is limited.

⁶ The b-girl represented on the videos is Honey Rockwell. From my experiences as a dancer, I know that she was one of the first (if not the) first b-girl to produce a solo video. She also pioneered, alongside Asia One and Rokafella, the movement of b-girls in the United States' scene that fostered the development of a huge increase in female participants. This will also be addressed later on in this chapter.

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Appendix A – Research Ethics Board Form - Approved January 9, 2006 – Pg. 1

FILE: 05-115 Fogarty

Supplementary Information:

Written Consent For Dancers:

WRITTEN CONSENT: For Dancers

Date: _____

The purpose of my current project, entitled “What ever happened to breakdancing: transnational b-boy/b-girl networks, underground video magazines and imagined affinities” is to examine the Toronto b-boy/b-girl (“breakdance”) scene and dance styles. My main focus is the 1990s. I am interested in interviewing you on your personal experiences to get a well-rounded view of the events surrounding the development of the dance style and scene in Toronto. This project is part of a larger historical project I am working on about the intersection of global hip hop culture and local styles.

I will ask you if you agree to be interviewed and I want you to know that there is absolutely no consequence to not doing the interview. I am trusting that you will be truthful with me and let me know if you do not feel comfortable participating. The interview process will be as follows: we will go through a consent process and then I will ask you a series of questions. The expected duration of the interview is thirty minutes. If the interview is done live, the audio and videotapes will be used only at your discretion and with your permission and will only being used to aid in my correct documentation of interviews. They will not be used for future film projects or presentations.

If you change your mind at any point during the interview then just let me know and we will stop. Also, if you feel strongly that the some of the information you provided is confidential and you would not want me to use it as part of the study then just let me know and it will be destroyed. If you want to say something off the record, please indicate it and I will not manually record the information (or record it in anyway). Although the parameters of this project are for my MA thesis, I do plan to keep the documents for future historical analysis of the dance for possible future publications – so consider this as well. I may quote you in my work and name you by your b-boy/b-girl name or full name. You can let me know how you would prefer to be named as well. **You have the option to use a pseudonym instead of your real name.**

This study has been reviewed and received ethics board clearance through the Brock University Research Ethics Board (File # 05-115.) If you have any questions of concerns about this study, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550 ext. 3035 or reb@brocku.ca. The data from the interviews will be stored at my house and I will have access to the transcripts from there. I will keep the data confidential; it will be stored at my residence. My advisor and I will have access to the data. **You will receive a copy of the consent form, please keep this for your records.**



Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB)

Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Human Participants

Please refer to the documents “Brock University Research Ethics Guidelines” which can be found at <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/>, prior to completion and submission of this application. If you have questions about or require assistance with the completion of this form, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at (905) 688-5550 ext. 3035, or reb@brocku.ca.

Return your completed application and all accompanying material in triplicate to the Research Ethics Officer in MacKenzie Chown D266. Please ensure all necessary items are attached prior to submission, otherwise your application will not be processed (see checklist below). ***No research with human participants shall commence prior to receiving approval from the research ethics board.***

Original Copy + 2 additional copies of the following DOCUMENTS	✓ if applicable
Recruitment Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of invitation • Verbal script • Telephone script • Advertisements (newspapers, posters, experimetrix) • Electronic correspondence guide 	<div style="text-align: center;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div>
Consent Materials <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent form • Assent form for minors • Parental/3rd party consent • Transcriber confidentiality agreement 	<div style="text-align: center;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div>
Data Gathering Instruments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questionnaires • Interview guides • Tests 	<div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <input type="checkbox"/> </div>
Feedback Letter	<input type="checkbox"/>
Letter of Approval for research from cooperating organizations, school board(s), or other institutions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Any previously approved protocol to which you refer	<input type="checkbox"/>

Office of Research Services

Brock University • 500 Glenridge Ave • St. Catharines, ON • L2S 3A1

SIGNATURES

Principal Investigator:

Please indicate that you have read and fully understand all ethics obligations by checking the box beside each statement.

- ☒ I have read Section III:8 of Brock University's Faculty Handbook pertaining to Research Ethics and agree to comply with the policies and procedures outlined therein.
- ☒ I will report any serious adverse events (SAE) to the Research Ethics Board (REB).
- ☒ Any additions or changes in research procedures after approval has been granted will be submitted to the REB.
- ☒ I agree to request a renewal of approval for any project continuing beyond the expected date of completion or for more than one year.
- ☒ I will submit a final report to the Office of Research Services once the research has been completed.
- ☒ I take full responsibility in ensuring that all other investigators involved in this research follow the protocol as outlined in the application.

Signature _____ Date: November 2, 2005

Co-Investigators:

Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Faculty Supervisor:

Please indicate that you have read and fully understand the obligations as faculty supervisor listed below by checking the box beside each statement.

- ☐ I agree to provide the proper supervision of this study to ensure that the rights and welfare of all human participants are protected.
- ☐ I will ensure a request for renewal of a proposal is submitted if the study continues beyond the expected date of completion or for more than one year.
- ☐ I will ensure that a final report is submitted to the Office of Research Services.
- ☐ I have read and approved the application and proposal.

Signature _____ Date: _____

SECTION A – GENERAL INFORMATION

- Title of the Research Project:** Breakdancing Culture: Where Global and Local Intersect
- Investigator Information:**

	Name	Rank	Dept./Address	Phone No.	E-Mail
Principal Investigator	Mary Fogarty	Student	Communications, Popular Culture and Film: Brock University Scotia Bank Hall 308 500 Glenridge Avenue St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S-3A1	905-688-4925	mf05qe@brocku.ca
Co-Investigator (s)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Faculty Supervisor(s)					

3. **Proposed Date (dd/mm/yyyy)** (a) of commencement: Nov. 3, 2005 (b) of completion: Nov. 3, 2006

4. **Indicate the location(s)** where the research will be conducted:

Brock University ☐
Community Site ☐ Specify
School Board ☐ Specify
Hospital ☐ Specify
Other ☒ Specify: Phone Interviews, e-mail correspondence and at hip hop events in Toronto.

5. **Other Ethics Clearance/Permission:**

(a) Is this a multi-centered study? ☐ Yes ☒ No
(b) Has any other University Research Ethics Board approved this research? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If **YES**, there is no need to provide further details about the protocol **at this time**, provided that **all** of the following information is provided:

Title of the project approved elsewhere: N/A
Name of the Other Institution: N/A
Name of the Other Board: N/A
Date of the Decision: N/A
A contact name and phone number for the other Board: N/A

Please provide a copy of the application to the other institution together with all accompanying materials as well as a copy of the clearance certificate / approval.

If **NO**, will any other Research Ethics Board be asked for approval? ☐ Yes ☒ No
Specify University/College N/A

(d) Has any other person(s) or institutions granted permission to conduct this research? ☐ Yes ☒ No
Specify (e.g., school boards, community organizations, proprietors) N/A

6. **Level of the Research:**

☐ Undergraduate ☒ Masters Thesis/Project ☐ Ph.D.
☐ Post Doctorate ☐ Faculty Research ☐ Administration
☐ Course Assignment (specify) ☐ Other (specify)

7. **Funding of the Project:**

(a) Is this project currently being funded ☒ Yes ☐ No
(b) If **No**, is funding being sought ☐ Yes ☐ No

If Applicable:

(c) Period of Funding (dd/mm/yyyy): From: 01/09/2005 To: 01/09/2006
(d) Agency or Sponsor (funded or applied for)

☐ CIHR ☐ NSERC ☒ SSHRC (Canada Graduate Scholarship)
☐ Other (specify):

8. **Conflict of Interest:**

(a) Will the researcher(s), members of the research team, and/or their partners or immediate family members:

(i) receive any personal benefits related to this study - for example: a financial remuneration, patent and ownership, employment, consultancies, board membership, share ownership, stock options (Do not include conference and travel expense

coverage, possible academic promotion, or other benefits which are integral to the conduct of research generally). ☐ Yes ☒ No

(ii) if Yes, please describe the benefits below.

N/A

- (b) Describe any restrictions regarding access to or disclosure of information (during or at the end of the study) that the sponsor has placed on the investigator(s).

N/A

SECTION B – SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

9. Rationale:

Describe the purpose and background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypothesis(es)/research question(s) to be examined.

The purpose of the project is to examine the influence of different media technologies on the Toronto hip hop dance style known as break dancing. I want to investigate how the dancers are influenced by oral traditions, traveling dancers, music videos and independent videos and to what extent they are by each separate media.

10. Methods:

Are any of the following procedures or methods involved in this study? Check **all** that apply.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire (mail) | <input type="checkbox"/> Focus Groups | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-invasive physical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire (email/web) | <input type="checkbox"/> Journals | measurement (e.g., exercise, heart |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire (in person) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio/video taping | rate, blood pressure) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview(s) (telephone) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unobtrusive observations | <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis of human tissue, body |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview(s) (in person) | <input type="checkbox"/> Invasive physiological | fluids, etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Data | measurements (e.g., ventipuncture, | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: (specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer-administered tasks | muscle biopsies) | |

Describe sequentially, and in detail, all procedures in which the research participants will be involved (e.g., paper and pencil tasks, interviews, questionnaires, physical assessments, physiological tests, time requirements, etc.) **Attach a copy of all questionnaire(s), interview guides, or other test instruments.**

The research participants (dancers) will answer questions about their personal dance history and I will record the conversations on video or by audio for the sole purpose of assuring the accuracy of the interview transcript. I will also observe form and styles of the dance as well as the social interactions between the dancers. [Note: I will seek consent of club owners or managers before observation takes place and leave them with my contact information.]

11. Professional Expertise/Qualifications:

Does this procedure require professional expertise/recognized qualifications? ☐ Yes ☒ No

If YES, specify: N/A

Do you, your supervisor, or any members of your research team have the professional expertise/recognized qualifications required? ☐ Yes ☒ No

12. **Participants:**

Describe the number of participants and any required demographics characteristics (e.g., age, gender).

The participants are dancers that specifically do the style known as break dancing. They are of both genders and range in age from nineteen to thirty. I plan to interview 20-30 dancers that participated in the scene predominantly in the 1990s.

13. **Recruitment:**

Describe how and from what sources the participants will be recruited, including any relationship between the investigator(s), sponsor(s) and participant(s) (e.g., family member, instructor-student; manager-employee).

Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

The participants recruited are mostly known to myself, as I also dance and attended events in Toronto in the 1990s. Those dancers that I don't know personally, I will be introduced to through my "gatekeeper" dancer, Nylda Gallardo-Lopez, who also lives in Toronto and knew all the dancers in the scene. She is a close friend and crew member for me. I am trusting that the participants that do know me will be honest enough to tell me if they do not feel comfortable participating.

14. **Compensation:**

Yes No

(a) Will participants receive compensation for participation?

[] [☒]

(b) If yes, please provide details.

N/A

SECTION C – DESCRIPTION OF THE RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

15. **Possible Risks:**

1. Indicate if the participants might experience any of the following risks:

a) Physical risks (including any bodily contact, physical stress, or administration of any substance)?

[] Yes [☒] No

b) Psychological risks (including feeling demeaned, embarrassed worried or upset, emotional stress)?

[] Yes [☒] No

c) Social risks (including possible loss of status, privacy, and / or reputation)?

[] Yes [☒] No

d) Are any possible risks to participants greater than those that the participants might encounter in their everyday life?

[] Yes [☒] No

e) Is there any deception involved?

[] Yes [☒] No

f) Is there potential for participants to feel coerced into contributing to this research (e.g., because of regular contact between them and the researcher)?

[] Yes [☒] No

2. If you answered **Yes** to any of 1a – 1f above, please explain the risk.

N/A

3. Describe how the risks will be managed (include the availability of appropriate medical or clinical expertise, qualified persons). Give an explanation as to why less risky alternative approaches could not be used.

N/A

16. **Possible Benefits:**

Discuss any potential direct benefits to the participants from their involvement in the project. Comment on the (potential) benefits to the scientific community/society that would justify involvement of participants in this study.

The dancers will potentially benefit through their involvement in the project through its contribution to the historicization of their local dance styles and scene. To justify their involvement to the public, it will contribute to the ongoing dialogue about how communications are affected by various technological mediums and how this contributes to the development of art forms and art communities.

SECTION D – THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS

17. **The Consent Process:**

Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain informed consent. Include a description of who will be obtaining the informed consent. If there will be no written consent form, explain why not.

For information about the required elements in the letter of invitation and the consent form, as well as samples, please refer to: http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/Certification&Policies/Certification&Policies_App_Guidelines.html

If applicable, attach a copy of the Letter of Invitation, the Consent Form, the content of any telephone script and any other material that will be utilized in the informed consent process.

There will be no written consent form because that would make the participants feel uncomfortable. I will explain the project that I am working and ask their permission to interview them, letting them know that they don't have to answer any questions they don't want to and they can discontinue the interview at anytime. Also, I will give them a card containing information about ethics, consent and my contact numbers in case they change their mind at any time.

18. **Consent by an authorized party:**

If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternative source of consent, including any permission form to be provided to the person(s) providing the alternative consent.

N/A

19. **Alternatives to prior individual consent:**

If obtaining individual participant consent prior to commencement of the research project is not appropriate for this research, please explain and provide details for a proposed alternative consent process.

N/A

20. **Feedback to Participants:**

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the project. Include, for example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, and access to the results of the research. Also, describe the method and timing for delivering the feedback.

I will tell participants informally what other comments I have received that may be of interest, without giving any names. I am also making a copy of the final written project and making it available online for them to access for future historical analysis of the Toronto dance styles and scene.

21. **Participant withdrawal:**

- a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project. Outline the procedures that will be followed to allow the participants to exercise this right.

I will let them know upon asking for their permission, that there is no pressure to do the interview and they can withdraw at any time with absolutely no consequence or explanation. I will also give them a card with my contact information so if they change their mind in the future they can let me know.

- b) Indicate what will be done with the participant's data and any consequences that withdrawal might have on the participant, including any effect that withdrawal may have on participant compensation.

If they withdraw from the study, I will destroy the data and there will no consequences whatsoever.

SECTION E – CONFIDENTIALITY & ANONYMITY

Confidentiality: information revealed by participants that holds the expectation of privacy (this means that all data collected will not be shared with anyone except the researchers listed on this application).

Anonymity: information revealed by participants will not have any distinctive character or recognition factor, such that information can be matched to individual participants (any information collected using audio-taping, video recording, or interview cannot be considered anonymous).

22. Given the definitions above,

- a) Will the data be treated as confidential? [☒] Yes [] No

- b) Are the data anonymous? [☒] Yes [] No: **They can choose whether they would prefer to remain anonymous in the written project.**

- c) State who will have access to the data.

Myself , Mary Fogarty and my advisor, Prof. Andy Bennett.

- (d) Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Anything that the dancer identifies as confidential will not be recorded or released (written) in any format.

- e) If participant anonymity and/or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details, how all participants will be advised that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

I will give them the option of whether they want to give their real name, remain anonymous OR if they would prefer I use a pseudonym for them in the study results.

- f) Explain how written records, video/audio tapes, and questionnaires will be secured, and provide details of their final disposal or storage (including for how long they will be secured and the disposal method to be used).

The records will be stored at my house and I will not destroy them after the project is over because this may be valuable for my Ph. D. on a related but expanded context.

SECTION F -- SECONDARY USE OF DATA

23. a) Is it your intention to reanalyze the data for purposes other than described in this application? [☒] Yes [] No
(except perhaps for my doctoral research)

- b) Is it your intention to allow the study and data to be reanalyzed by colleagues, students, or other researchers outside of the original research purposes? If this is the case, explain how you will allow your participants the opportunity to choose to participate in a study where their data would be distributed to others (state how you will contact participants to obtain their re-consent)

NO.

- c) If there are no plans to reanalyze the data for secondary purposes and yet, you wish to keep the data indefinitely, please explain why.

N/A

SECTION G -- MONITORING ONGOING RESEARCH

24. Annual Review and Serious Adverse Events (SAE):

- a) Minimum review requires the completion of a "Renewal/Project Completed" form at least annually. Indicate whether any additional monitoring or review would be appropriate for this project.

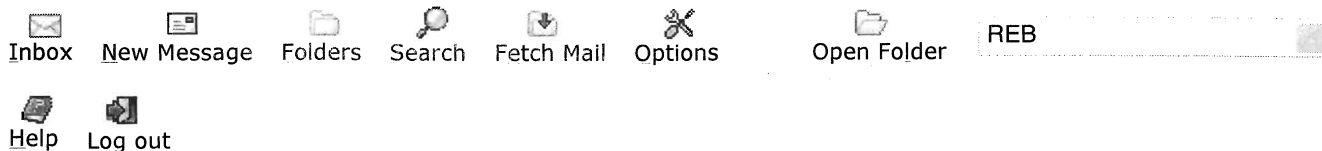
It is the investigator's responsibility to notify the REB using the "Renewal/Project Completed" form, when the project is completed, or if it is cancelled. <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/Forms/Forms.html>

N/A

***Serious adverse events** (unanticipated negative consequences or results affecting participants) **must be reported** to the Research Ethics Officer and the REB Chair, **as soon as possible** and in any event, no more than 3 days subsequent to their occurrence.

25. COMMENTS

If you experience any problems or have any questions about the Ethics Review Process at Brock University, please feel free to contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 ext 3035, or reb@brocku.ca



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REB: REB 05-115 FOGARTY - Approved (6 of 8)

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Date: Mon, 09 Jan 2006 14:49:52 -0500 [09/01/06 02:49:52 PM EST]

From: Research Ethics Board <reb@brocku.ca>

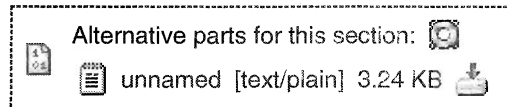
To: mf05qe@badger.ac.brocku.ca, andy.bennett@brocku.ca

Cc: mowen@brocku.ca, linda rose-krasnor <rebchair@brocku.ca>

Subject: REB 05-115 FOGARTY - Approved

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DATE: January 9, 2006

FROM: Linda Rose-Krasnor, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Andy Bennett, Communications, Popular Culture and Film
Mary Fogarty

FILE: 05-115 FOGARTY

TITLE: Breakdancing Culture: Where Global and Local Intersect

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified.

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of January 9, 2006 to November 3, 2006 subject to full REB ratification Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. **The study may not**

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the Board. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form **Request for Modification to an Ongoing Application**.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect the research, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and approved by the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form **Continuing Review/Final Report** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

LRK/bb

Brenda Brewster, Research Ethics Assistant
Office of Research Ethics, MC D250A
Brock University
Office of Research Services
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St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
phone: (905)688-5550, ext. 3035 fax: (905)688-0748
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<http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/ethics/humanethics/>

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